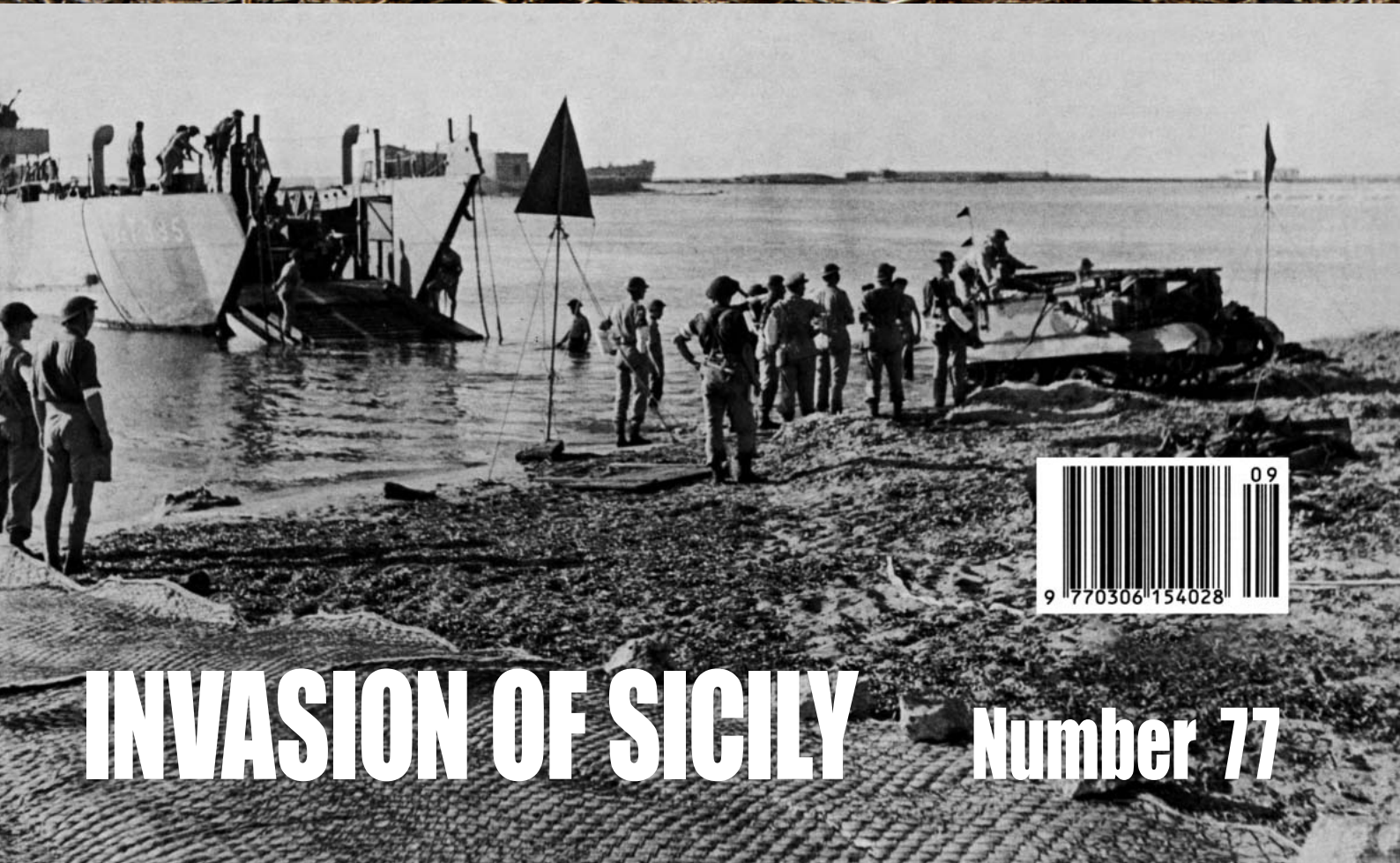
AFTER THE BATTLE



INVASION OF SICILY

Number 77

AFTER THE BATTLE

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Front Cover: Sergeant Rooke's picture of the 231st Brigade landing at Marzamemi in 1943 contrasts with the peaceful pleasure beach on the east coast of Sicily today. (IWM)

Centre Pages, *left:* One of the most-forgotten wartime memorials in Europe: the 51st Highland Division's obelisk on a deserted hilltop near Sferro. It was erected immediately after the end of the Sicilian campaign and unveiled on November 4, 1943 before the division left the Mediterranean for Britain. *Right:* The 82nd Airborne Division's monument stands near the bridge at Ponte Dirillo along Route 115. (Karel Margry)

Back Cover: For 25 years, these were the secret graves of Hitler and Eva Braun *(top)* and the Goebbels family *(bottom).* Karel Margry, our ETO Editor, visited the quiet back street in Magdeburg before the area was dug up by British and Dutch journalists in July 1992.

Photo Credits: AP — Associated Press. RIOD — Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie. IWM — Imperial War Museum.

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Foothold in Europe. On July 10, 1943, two months after the surrender of all Axis forces in North Africa, the Allies landed in Sicily. In the early hours, combined British, Canadian and American forces assaulted eight beaches on the eastern and southern shores of the ten thousand square mile volcanic island at the toe of Italy. The invasion comprised a total of seven divisions, three British, three American and one Canadian. These were some of the first pictures taken. *Top:* **Sergeant Silverside pictured a shell bursting amongst shipping off the British 5th Division beach at Cassibile. (IWM)**

On July 10, 1943, two Allied armies landed on the shores of Axis-held Sicily. The invasion of Sicily, Operation 'Husky' was the largest amphibious operation in history: seven divisions were landed from the sea simultaneously. (In Normandy, a year later, there were only five.) It showed the Allied commanders how far they had progressed in learning how to handle the planning and execution of massive combined operations and simultaneous assault from the sea and sky. In the field of amphibious assault technique, 'Husky' introduced a whole new range of landing craft, including the LST (Landing Ship, Tank), the LCT (Landing Craft, Tank), the LCI (Landing Craft, Infantry), the LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle or Personel) and the DUKW. It was also the first time that the Allies made large-scale use of airborne troops. Sicily also marked the coming of age of the US Army in World War II. There, fighting beside the more experienced British desert veteran, the American soldier showed what he could do.

Thirty-eight days after the landing, the Allies had conquered Sicily, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had been overthrown and Italy was on the brink of surrender. Yet it was a disappointing victory, a 'bitter victory'. For the stronger enemy, the German army, had pulled off a brilliant escape, successfully evacuating most of its troops and materiel to the Italian mainland, ready to fight another day.

The Canadian 1st Division landed on Costa dell'Ambra, the bay on the west side of the Pachino peninsula, on two adjacent beaches. This is 'Sugar Beach', where the Seaforth Highlanders and the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry came ashore.

THE INVASION OF SICILY

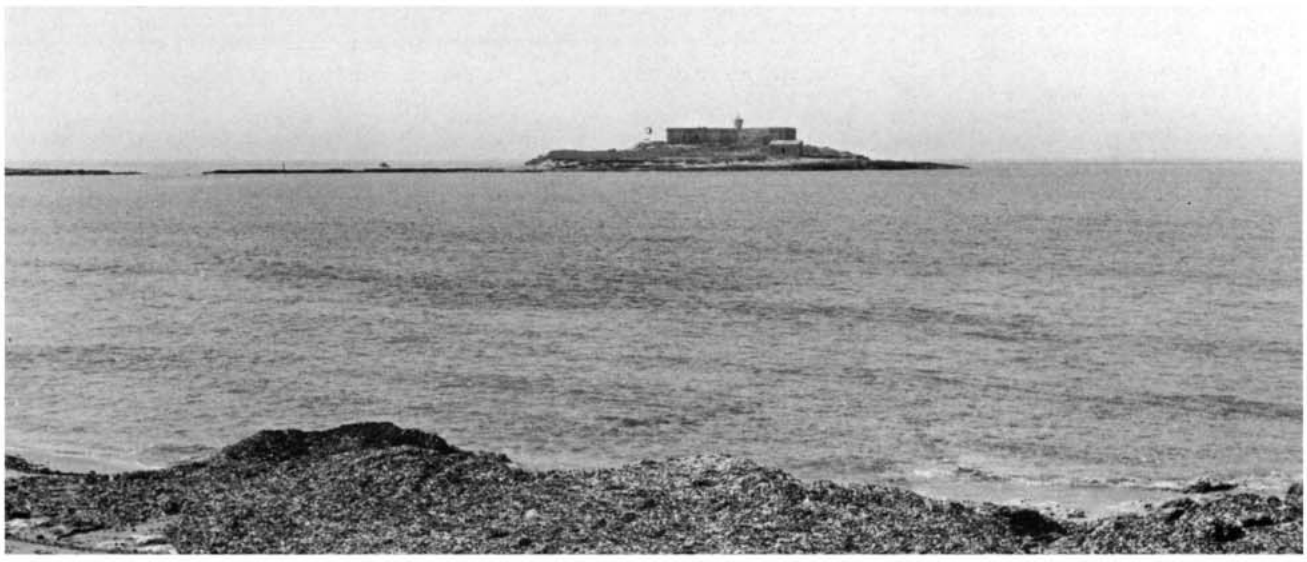
By Karel Margry

OPERATION 'HUSKY'

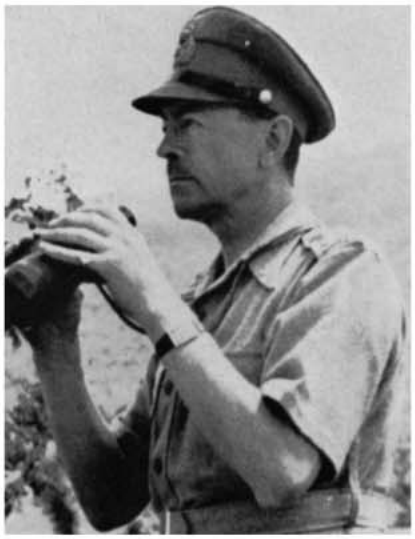
The decision to invade Sicily had been taken in January 1943. At the Casablanca Conference, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff agreed that the next step after the defeat of the Axis forces in North Africa would be the capture of Sicily. It was a compromise decision between the British wish to continue a Mediterranean strategy, aimed at knocking Italy out of the war and relieving pressure on the Russian front by attacking the 'soft underbelly' of Europe, and the American desire for direct action against Germany via a cross-Channel invasion of northern France. Thus, in exchange for American support of an invasion of Sicily, the British committed themselves to a cross-Channel attack in 1944.

Following Casablanca, a comprehensive deception program was designed, and carried out with undreamed-of success, to fool the Axis into thinking that not Sicily, but Greece and Sardinia-Corsica would be the next Allied targets. The cover scheme included false radio traffic, dummy invasion installations, increased sabotage operations in Greece and the planting of the corpse of a fake British courier, allegedly drowned and carrying misleading strategic information ('The Man who Never was'; see *After the Battle* No. 54).

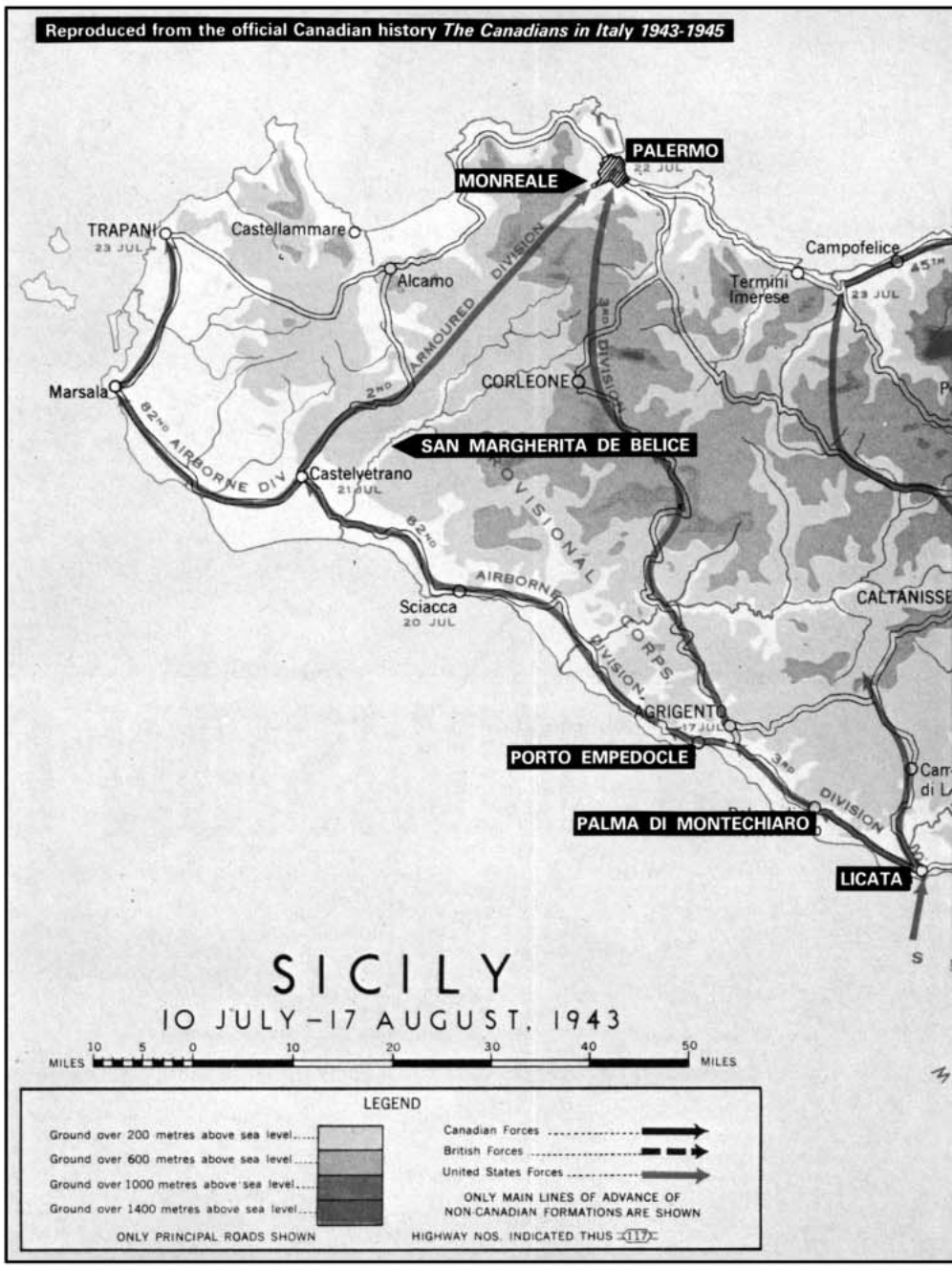
In January 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed supreme commander for Operation 'Husky'. Under him, General Sir Harold Alexander was to command the land forces (15 Army Group), Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham was to be naval commander and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder the air commander. As army commanders Eisenhower chose General Sir Bernard Montgomery for the British task force and Lieutenant General George S. Patton for the American. However, until the fall of Tunis in May, most commanders were preoccupied with operations in North Africa and did not devote much time to 'Husky'.



Top and above: **The 51st Highland Division landed on beaches along 'Bark South', the extreme southern tip of the Pachino peninsula. This is rocky 'Amber Beach', where 152nd Brigade and Tactical Division Headquarters came ashore, taken just after dawn on D-Day. The small breakwater island, visible behind LCT 622, is called Isola delle Correnti. (IWM)**



General Sir Harold Alexander, commander of the Allied invasion armies.



Planning started in February 1943 by a 15 Army Group nucleus staff named Force 141 and based at Algiers.

Only 90 miles across the sea from North Africa and a scant two miles across the Strait of Messina from the Italian mainland, Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean. Along most of its 600-mile shoreline, there is only a narrow coastal plain before rugged mountains rise up steeply. The only sizeable stretch of flat land is the Plain of Catania on the east coast. Dominating the island is the 10,000-foot high volcanic cone of Mt Etna. Sicily has a long history of wars, invasions and foreign domination and, as a result, most of its people live in inland towns built on high mountain tops and forming natural fortresses. Roads are few and movement off the road difficult and often impossible.

The Force 141 planners concentrated on selection of the points at which the main assaults would be made. The most important immediate objectives were ports, needed to supply the invasion forces, and airfields, both to deny them to the enemy and for use by the Allied supporting air forces.

Messina, at the north-eastern tip of the island, was the largest port. However, a direct assault against it was ruled out because of the heavy fortifications known to exist along the Strait and because it was out of effective range of fighter aircraft based on Malta and in Tunisia. The other major ports were Palermo, in the north-west, and Catania, Syracuse and Augusta in the south-east.

The airfields were found in three clusters: on the Plain of Catania in the east, on the coastal plain behind Gela in the south, and at the western end of the island.

Taking account of these considerations, the first outline plan proposed simultaneous landings by an Eastern (British) and a Western (US) Task Force. The British were to land three divisions at widely separated points stretching from Syracuse to Gela, followed on D+3 by a one-division assault on Catania. The Americans were to land one division at Sciacca, in the south-west, to capture the western airfields, followed on D+2 by a direct assault on Palermo by two divisions.

At the first meeting of the three service chiefs on March 13, Alexander argued that the proposed landings were far to dispersed to support each other. Montgomery, too, insisted the plan be recast as soon as he heard of its details. He expected a strong Axis opposition in Sicily and therefore wanted stronger and more concentrated initial landings. But his proposal to cancel the British landings at Gela in order to strengthen the assault further east met with protest from both Tedder, who argued that this would leave the Gela airfields in enemy hands, and Cunningham, who was against concentrated landings because they would dangerously amass the invasion fleet.

An alternative plan, put forward by the Force 141 planners, to cancel the proposed landing at Sciacca and side-slip the US division involved to the Gela sector, was unacceptable for much the same reasons, apart from the fact that it would put American forces under British command. Patton protested too, because it would weaken his army's assault and deprive him of much-needed airfields.

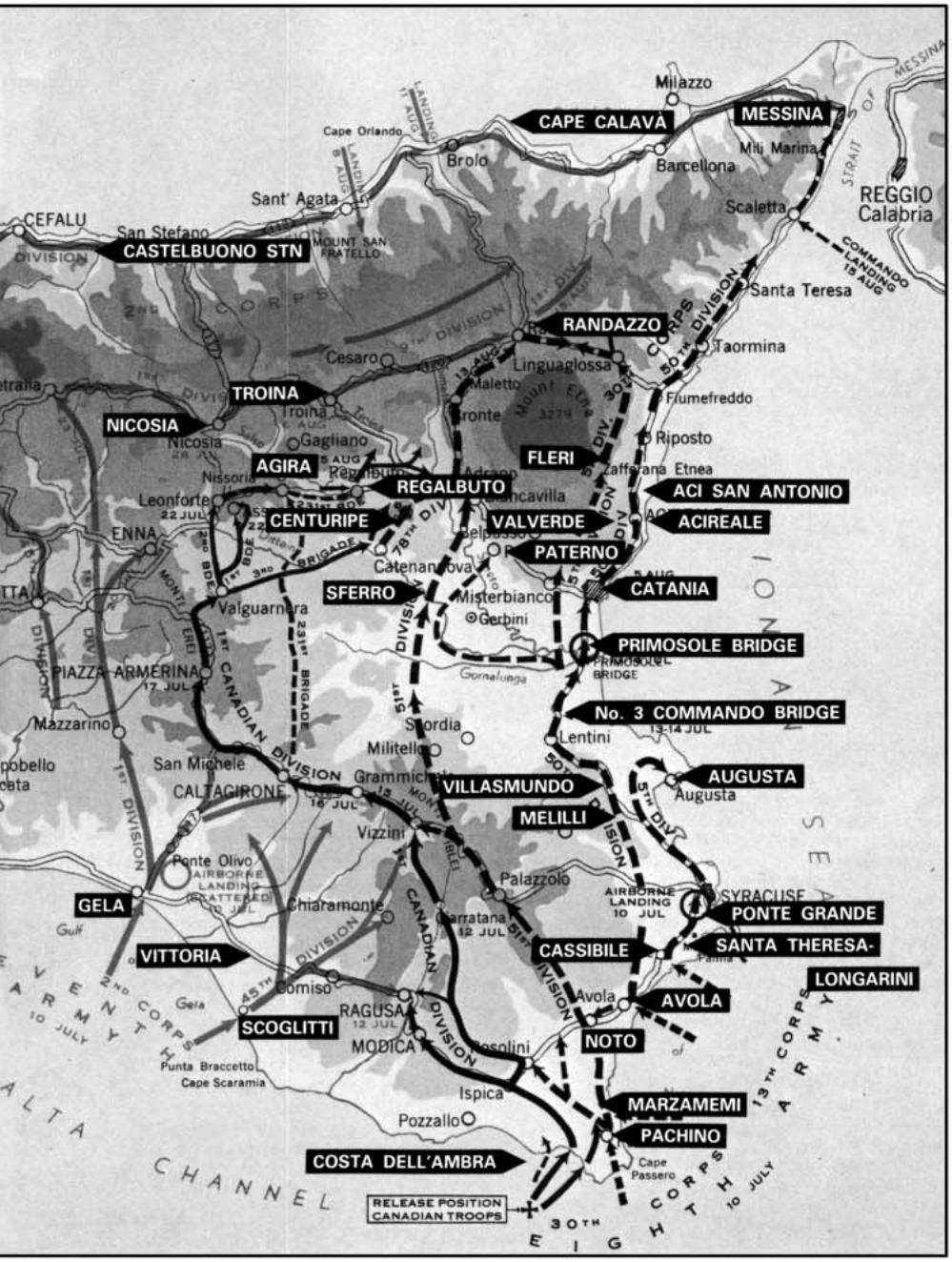
Stormy inter-service discussions, made more difficult by the wide dispersal of the many headquarters involved, went on all through March and April. The contadictory demands of army, navy and air could not be reconciled on the plan proposed either by Alexander's planners or Montgomery.

To break the deadlock, Eisenhower called another meeting of the 'Husky' commanders in Algiers for May 2. There, in what was 'surely one of the most unorthodox and comical encounters of the war', Montgomery, at a chance meeting in the AFHQ lavatory, convinced the AFHQ Chief-of-Staff, Major General W. Bedell Smith, that the Palermo operation should be dropped altogether and the entire Western Task Force diverted to the Gulf of Gela, on the immediate left of the Eastern Task Force, thereby ensuring unity of effort. Bedell Smith conveyed Montgomery's proposal to Eisenhower and he, realising the crisis should come to an end, decided to accept it on May 3.

The final order of battle and plan of attack were as follows:

Eastern Task Force (Force 545):
Naval commander: Admiral Sir B. H. Ramsay.
Air commander: Air Vice-Marshal H. Broadhurst.
British Eighth Army (Montgomery)

Eighth Army consisted of 13 Corps (Lieutenant-General M. C. Dempsey), made up of the 5th and 50th Divisions and the 4th Armoured Brigade, and 30 Corps



(Lieutenant-General O. Leese), comprising 1st Canadian and 51st Divisions, 231st Independent and 23rd Armoured Brigades.

Montgomery's army was to land on five beaches in the Gulf of Noto and around the Pachino peninsula with mission to capture Syracuse and Augusta and seize the eastern airfields, prior to a rapid advance on Catania and, ultimately, Messina.

To support the landing, 1st Airlanding Brigade of 1st Airborne Division was to seize the important Ponte Grande bridge south of Syracuse. In reserve in North Africa were 78th Division and 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade.

Western Task Force (Force 343):
Naval commander: Vice Admiral H. K. Hewitt.
Air commander: Major General E. J. House.
US Seventh Army (Patton)

Patton would land three task forces. Two of them — 'Cent Force' (45th Division), to land at Scoglitti and 'Dime Force' (US 1st Division, reinforced by two Ranger battalions), to land at Gela — were to operate under II Corps (Major General O. N. Bradley), while one, 'Joss Force' (US 3rd Division with a Ranger battalion and, as floating reserve, Combat Command A of US 2nd Armored Division), to land at Licata, was to operate independently.

In Seventh Army's floating reserve were the rest of 2nd Armored and the 1st Division's 18th Infantry, both to land at Gela. Seventh Army's mission was to seize the Gela airfields, form a firm bridgehead and protect Eighth Army's flank.

The night before the landings, the reinforced US 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment would be dropped inland from the Gela beaches to protect and support the seaborne assault. In reserve in North Africa were the rest of US 82nd Airborne Division and US 9th Division. D-Day was scheduled for Saturday, July 10, 1943.

By this date, the Allies had achieved complete air superiority in the Mediterranean. Whereas the Axis' air strength had been reduced to some 750 servicable aircraft — 430 German (250 of which were fighter planes) and 325 (200 fighters) Italian —

Feldmarschall Albert Kesselring, German C-in-C (Oberbefehlshaber Süd) in Italy.

Tedder's Mediterranean Air Command, with 113 British and 146 American squadrons available, could employ more than 4,300 aircraft.

THE AXIS SITUATION

Because of the Axis' air and naval weakness, the whole burden of the defence of Sicily fell on its ground forces.

All Italian formations in Sicily formed part of the Italian Sixth Army, commanded since May 1943 by Generale d'Armata Alfredo Guzzoni. It had two corps, XII and XVI, comprising five coastal divisions, two coastal brigades and one coastal regiment — all static formations disposed round the coast, but of low morale and little fighting value — and four field divisions: the 4th (Livorno), 26th (Assieta), 28th (Aosta) and 54th (Napoli) Divisions. In addition, there were five port and naval base defence commands, several independent aerodrome defence units and five 'mobile groups' stationed at key inland points.

The backbone of the island garrison, however, were the two German divisions on the island: 15. Panzergrenadier-Division and the Hermann Göring Panzer-Division. The 15. Panzergrenadier-Division was 15,000 strong, well-supplied, well-trained and had some 60 tanks. The Hermann Göring was some 17,000 strong and had about 110 tanks, including 17 heavy PzKpfw VI Tigers. The division had been recently reconstituted and was not yet up to full standard in training and command efficiency.

Nominally, and for political reasons, the two divisions had been placed under tactical control of General Guzzoni. In actual fact, they were controlled by Generalleutnant Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, the German liaison officer between Feldmarschall Albert Kesselring, the German C-in-C (OB Süd) in Italy, and Guzzoni.

On D-Day, the Axis disposition was as follows: the Aosta and Assieta Divisions and two-thirds of 15. Panzergrenadier--Division were in western Sicily, guarding Palermo; the Livorno and Napoli Divisions and the bulk of the Hermann Göring Division were in the central and south-eastern part of the island, ready to counter an invasion in the south; and one German battlegroup, Kampfgruppe Schmalz (composed of an armoured force from the Hermann Göring and a panzergrenadier regiment of 15. Panzergrenadier-Division), was stationed near the east coast, directly behind Catania. In all, there were about 40,000 German and 230,000 Italian troops in Sicily.

The Ponte Grande bridge over the Anapo River, just south of Syracuse harbour, site of the ill-fated glider assault on the night of July 9-10. Of the eight gliders carrying the coup-de-main force, only one, Horsa No. 133, carrying a platoon of the 2nd South Staffordshires under Lieutenant L. Withers, landed on the correct LZ just east of the bridge. Undaunted, they went in, attacked the pillbox defending the bridge and removed the demolition charges. More men arrived and, by dawn, some 73 Red Devils held the vital objective. Soon, the Italians counter-attacked with mortars and four armoured cars. The airborne troops held on until, at 3.30 p.m., their ammo ran out. Of the 13 men left unwounded, only 8 managed to escape southward. Half an hour later, the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, at the head of the 5th Division, which by then had come ashore further south, arrived and immediately stormed the bridge with Bren carriers, driving off the enemy and rescuing the captured glidermen. The present-day bridge is a post-war one. Of the original bridge, only the piers and northern ramp remain.

THE AIRBORNE LANDINGS

The invasion fleet sailed from widely dispersed embarkation ports. The 45th Division came directly from the United States, making only a short stop at Oran; the Canadian Division from Scotland; the other formations from harbours in the Middle East and North Africa. In all — battleships, troop ships, landing craft — the 'Husky' armada counted some 3,300 vessels. On July 9, the convoys made their rendezvous off Malta, then set course for Sicily.

The invasion force did not arrive unseen. Axis sea patrol planes first spotted the convoys on July 4. More sightings followed and by next day, General Guzzoni had concluded their target was Sicily. By July 9, he knew an invasion was not far off. At 7 p.m., he issued a preliminary alert; three hours later, he ordered a full alert.

The Allied airborne assaults preceding the landings met with great difficulties. An unexpected gale over the Mediterranean and bad visibility broke up the aerial columns flying from North Africa and caused the inexperienced pilots to lose their way.

Of 144 gliders carrying British 1st Airlanding Brigade to Sicily, some 60 were released too early and landed in the sea, with most of the men drowning. Only 54 arrived in Sicily, a mere 12 of them on or near the correct landing zones. As a result, less than 100

The American parachute drops on the night before the invasion were as much a failure as the British glider landings. The 3,400 US paratroopers found themselves scattered all over south-eastern Sicily. *Left:* 'US paratroopers advancing through the Sicilian countryside after night landing, Sicily, July 11, 1943' is all that the caption says of this picture taken by Signal Corps photographer Campbell. (US Army) Karel Margry comments: 'There are very few railways in the area of the American landings and from the map I had figured the Comisa-Gela track would offer the best chance. I was on the look-out for an S-curve railway crossing. I had already passed several straight crossings when I came to this one *(right)* at Dilligenza, just west of Vittoria. Discarding it as another straight one, I didn't even stop to have a look. As I sped on, I had a last glance through the rear-view mirror of my car and suddenly, with a shock, the distinctive image of the farmhouse in the distance fell in place: this was the spot! The S-bend had gone and the stone walls modernised, but for the rest nothing had changed.'

Above: **Only one American unit, Major Mark Alexander's 2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, hit ground relatively intact. It came down south of Comiso, 25 miles from its designated DZ. After capturing the town of Santa Croce Camerina and making contact with 45th Division, the battalion marched westward to rejoin its regiment. Here some of Alexander's weary troops are seen marching through Vittoria on D+2. (US Army)** *Below:* **Vittoria is one of those towns built on a rigid grid square plan and Karel spent an inordinate amount of time touring the labyrinth of almost identical streets before he finally found the spot: the Via Cavour at its intersection with the Via La Marmora in the centre of town.**

British airborne troops reached the objective, the Ponte Grande bridge south of Syracuse, to hold it until Eighth Army relieved them from the sea.

The 222 C-47s carrying 3,400 men of the 505th Parachute Infantry and the attached 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, dropped their loads all over south-eastern Sicily — 33 sticks landing in the Eighth Army area. Despite the disastrously scattered landings, a small force of paratroopers occupied the important high ground of Piano Lupo, north-east of Gela. Another seized the vitally important Ponte Dirillo bridge, which connected the Gela and Scoglitti beaches. Elsewhere, bands of paratroopers roamed through the enemy rear areas, causing chaos and confusion.

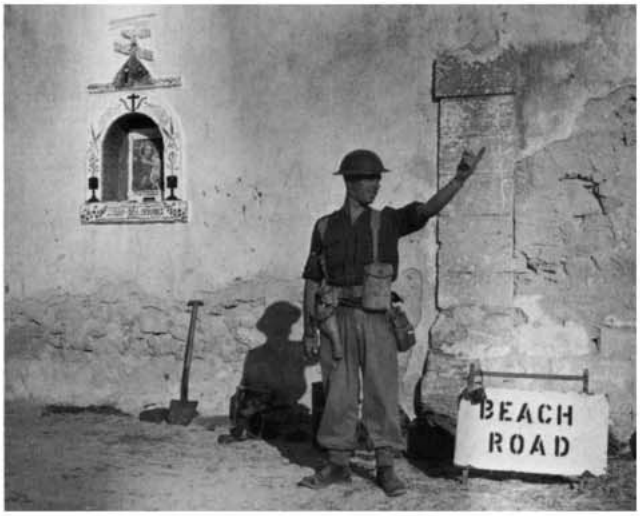
In the British sector, in addition to the 1st Canadian and 51st Highland Divisions, a third formation landed on the Pachino peninsula. This was 231st Malta Brigade which touched ground at the little fishing village of Marzamemi. (IWM)

THE EIGHTH ARMY LANDINGS

The seaborne landings began at 2.45 a.m. In general, the assault was an anti-climax. Most units landed successfully and without opposition. Because of rough seas, there was delay at some of the landing craft release positions. In the confusion and the dark, some first wave battalions were unable to find their beaches. Some were late, others landed at the wrong place. But in general, because of the negligible resistance on the beaches, most units sorted themselves out quickly.

At the south-eastern tip of the island, 30 Corps landed on all three sides of the Pachino peninsula: the 231st 'Malta' Brigade (Brigadier R. E. Urquhart) on its eastern shore, 51st Highland Division (Major-General D. N. Wimberley) on beaches around the southern tip, and 1st Canadian Division (Major-General G. C. Simonds) in the bay west of it. Before that, on the extreme west flank of Eighth Army and to give it a strong anchor, two Royal Marine Commandos, Nos. 40 and 41, had succesfully landed at Punta Castellazo.

Invasion beach comparisons are often very unrewarding, one beach not differing much from any other, but in this case the small harbour island with its distinctively-shaped building forms an unmistakable reference point.



Left: **Directly facing the sea, on the village road along the beach, an MP waves the 231st Brigade traffic from Marzamemi towards Pachino. Pictured by Sergeant J. Rooke on D-Day. (IWM)** *Right:* **Today, only the small niche remains.**

At the end of the day, almost from exactly the same spot, but now looking down the road to Pachino, Sergeant Rooke pictured Italian PoWs of the 206th Coastal Division marching down under escort to the Marzamemi beach. (IWM)

Above and below: **Another view of the 1st Canadian Division assault beach. Before the landing, the Canadian commanders had worried about two sandbars which lay submerged some distance off-shore and could ground the assault craft on their way in. However, on D-Day, a heavy swell caused a high surf which carried the craft right over the false beach. (IWM)**

Pachino, only a few miles inland from the beaches of both 51st Division and 231st Brigade, was 'the first Sicilian town captured by Eighth Army'. First to reach it were the 7th Argylls of 154th Brigade. In the afternoon, Major Keating photographed other troops of the Highland Division and a Sherman of the 50th Royal Tanks passing through the town. (IWM)

In Sicily, the Italian population viewed the Allies more as welcome liberators than as enemy conquerors and friendly scenes such as this one pictured at Pachino by Major Keating would be seen time and again during the campaign. (IWM)

From Pachino, 231st Brigade, followed by the 51st Division, marched northwards as fast as possible to link up with 13 Corps at Noto. *Left:* On July 11, Sergeant Lupson photographed infantry and a Priest SP gun leaving Pachino via Route 115 on their way to the north and passing civilians returning to the town in carts. (IWM) *Right:* Once a small town on a barren hill, Pachino today has spread across all sides of the slope. Karel's hired Panda makes a good stand-in for the mule cart.

Left and above: **After a gruelling march, the 30 Corps troops reached the city of Noto on July 11. Sergeant Wacket recorded their entry on Via Duca Giardino. (IWM)**

The Canadians and Highlanders quickly captured Pachino and its airfield and pushed inland. The 231st Brigade began a speedy march to the north to link up with 13 Corps at Noto — a hike of some 15 miles.

Southernmost in 13 Corps sector, the 50th Northumbrian Division (Major-General S. Kirkman) successfully assaulted the beaches north of the fishing town of Avola.

In 13 Corps area, 50th Northumbrian Division landed on beaches just north of Avola. Later that day, Sergeant Travis pictured Italian PoWs (the one in the centre actually carrying the proverbial suitcase!) being assembled for evacuation. (IWM)

Marching inland from the beach, the 50th Division troops soon hit Route 115, the main coastal road. Depending on their assigned task, some units turned north, others south. This infantry column has turned south, towards Avola. (IWM)

The bay of Fontane Bianchi was the landing beach for 5th Division. Although 15th Brigade was late and unable to find its correct beaches, and Italian artillery harassed the assault fleet until knocked out by the destroyer *Eskimo*, the 5th Division landings were successful. *Above:* **Italian prisoners-of-war, with makeshift headgear against the scorching sun, are put to work removing beach obstacles. (IWM)** *Below:* **Today, holiday beach cabins obstruct an easy exit from Fontane Bianchi beach. The group of farm buildings on the hill on the far side of the bay form a link with the past.**

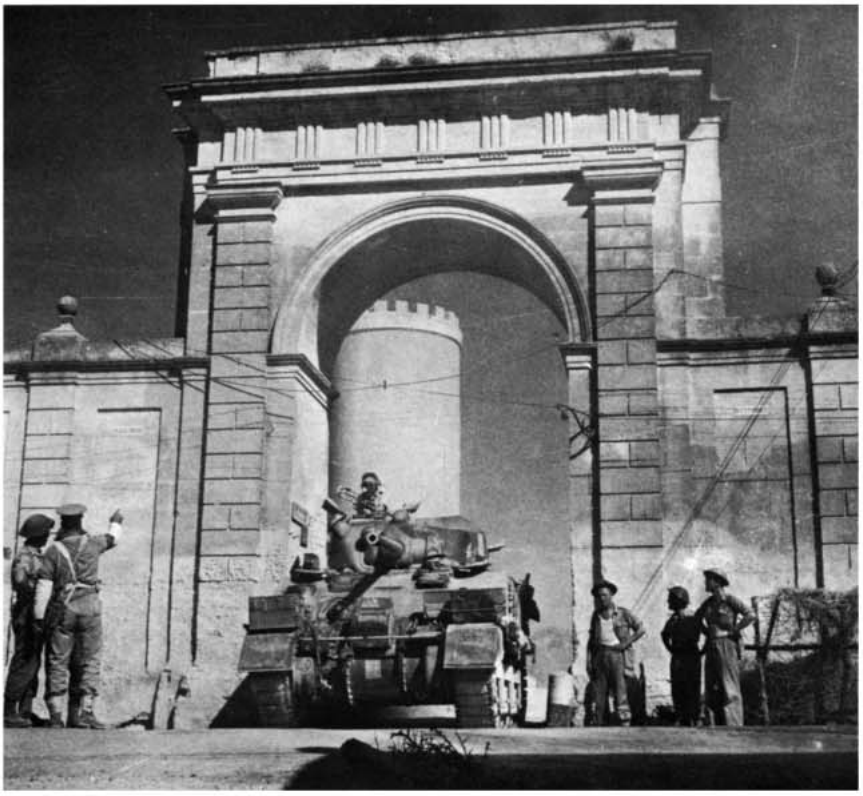
More to the north, British 5th Division (Major-General G. C. Bucknall) came ashore unopposed at Cassibile. By 8 a.m. they had the town secure. The 1st Special Raiding Squadron of 2nd SAS Regiment, landing in advance of the main force, neutralised a coastal battery nearby. On the extreme right flank of Eighth Army, No. 3 Commando did the same with a battery at Cape Murro di Porco.

In the afternoon, 5th Division started north to join up with the airlanded troops at the Ponte Grande. These, however, had by then been badly battered by Italian counter-attacks. The last survivors had just been driven off the bridge when the relieving force arrived. Undaunted, 5th Division stormed the bridge with Bren carriers, re-capturing it intact and freeing the airborne troops which had been taken prisoner, and continued to take the port of Syracuse undamaged that evening.

The 5th Division's Beachmaster gets organised on 'Charlie' Beach. Note the box for the loudspeaker batteries. (IWM)

Coming ashore on 'Charlie' Beach is one of the early type of mine-clearing tanks: an M3 Grant 'Scorpion'. (IWM)

Above left and right: **Immediately after landing, the 5th Division pushed north along Route 115 to quickly capture Syracuse.** *Below left:* **'An Allied tank makes a triumphant entry into Cassibile by way of a handsome arch' read the wartime caption of this photo taken by Sergeant Silverside on July 12. Although Cassibile was the first town captured by the 5th Division on its way north, in reality, the Sherman of the 3rd County of London Yeomanry is not at all entering the town, as the photographer would like us to believe. Worse still, its gun is actually pointing east, back towards the beaches!**



The Sherman is, in fact, driving through the gate of an enclosed market compound along Route 115, called Marchese di Cassibile, which lies just south of the town itself. The same gate is visible in the background of the two pictures at the top of this page. Today, the compound is inhabited by immigrant families from North Africa.

About halfway between Cassibile and Syracuse, at the railway crossing at Santa Teresa Longarini, the troops overran this Italian pillbox (on the left), painted to look like part of the railway warning signs, and a German 50mm anti-tank gun. Photographed two days later by Sergeant Bowman. (IWM)

Like many other S-bend rail crossings in Sicily, the one at Santa Teresa has been straightened out into a more gentle curve. The pillbox probably disappeared with the realignment. The station building has been altered too, but its number, 321, has remained the same.

The Seventh US Army landed 15 miles to the west of Eighth Army, with three divisions on seven beaches. The 45th Division disembarked east and west of Scoglitti. *Above and below:* **'Yellow 2' Beach, where the 157th Infantry landed.**

THE SEVENTH ARMY LANDINGS

There was a 15-mile gap between the British and the easternmost American beach.

'Cent Force', 45th Division (Major General T. H. Middleton), splashed ashore on beaches left and right of Scoglitti and managed to push inland nearly seven miles, at many places linking up with small groups of paratroopers.

Further west, 'Dime Force', 1st Division (Major General T. de la Mesa Allen), attacked the Gela sector. While Rangers assaulted the town itself, the division's main force landed on beaches three miles to the east. Soon the Americans began to move inland to their assigned objectives. On Seventh Army's left flank, 'Joss Force' came ashore east and west of Licata. The 3rd Division (Major General L. K. Truscott) captured the port by a pincer movement and at the end of the day had taken all its D-Day objectives.

The US 1st Division came ashore at Gela. While a special task force of two Ranger battalions, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel W. O. Darby, assaulted Gela itself, the main force landed east of the town. *Left:* **GIs disembarking from an LCM (Landing Craft Mechanised) III on 'Red 2' Beach. (US Army)** *Right:* **Most of the beaches used in Operation 'Husky' remain to be seen as they were in 1943. The 1st Division beaches east of Gela, however, have changed beyond recognition by the construction of the huge Agip petro-chemical plant, one of several post-war projects designed by the Italian government to bring industry and jobs to backward Sicily. This is what 'Red 2' Beach looks like today.**

Bulldozers at work on the beaches east of Licata where two regiments of US 3rd Division, the 30th and 15th Infantry, came ashore. (US Army)

The same sandy shore strip today. 'Blue Beach' in foreground, 'Yellow Beach' behind, with Licata, 3rd Division's first objective, in the far distance on the left.

Licata was seized by a two-pronged attack from east and west. The western pincer — the 3rd Rangers and the 2nd Battalion, 15th Infantry — landed here, on 'Green Beach' at Mollarella Rock, three miles from the town. (US Army)

The landings of the 15th Infantry on 'Yellow' were harassed by an Italian railway battery mounting four 76mm guns and positioned on a track on the mole of Licata harbour. It was silenced by US Navy guns. *Left:* Troops entering Licata found the armoured train a smouldering wreck. (US Army) *Right:* As the lighthouse, from which the picture was taken, was closed for entry, we took our comparison from the tenth floor of an apartment building, further back on Licata's sea front.

Left: **Prime target of the Axis counter-invasion moves, Gela was attacked from three sides on D-Day. One Italian column, 13 tanks with escorting infantry from Mobile Group E, although disrupted by naval shelling from the destroyer *Shubrick*, actually got into Gela itself where it began a deadly game of hide and seek with the Rangers who fought back with hand-grenades and rocket-launchers. Colonel Darby himself dashed down to the beach, returned with a commandeered 37mm gun and knocked out one tank. Out of grenades, two of his men lugged 15lb blocks of TNT to the top of a building and dropped them on the tanks. Judging by the crater around it, this Italian tank could well be one of their victims. (US Army)**
Right: **Forty-nine years later, Gela has sprawled and what were once the first houses as one entered Gela from the east, are today unobtrusive old houses completely enveloped by new buildings on what is now Via Generale Cascino.**

The Axis reaction to the enemy landings was threefold. First, as soon as he heard of them, General Guzzoni ordered a counter-attack against the beachhead which he considered the most dangerous: that at Gela. The Hermann Göring Division, from its bases around Caltagirone, was to attack from the north-east, assisted by two of the Italian 'mobile groups' that were already nearer to the coast, and the Livorno Division was to do the same from the north-west. The attack was to be strong and co-ordinated.

Secondly, he ordered 15. Panzergrenadier-Division, which had just completed a move to western Sicily, to immediately retrace its steps and return to the centre of the island.

Thirdly, late on D-Day, after he learned of the loss of Syracuse, he ordered Kampfgruppe Schmalz and the Napoli Division to rush south from Catania and retake the port.

Because of bad communications, the visualised broad-fronted, co-ordinated push against Gela became a series of uncoordinated, independent thrusts by small Axis units at varying times and at various places along the centre of the American front.

The first attack, by 'Mobile Group E' was foiled by American naval gun-fire and stopped near Piano Lupo by fiercely-fighting paratroopers and, later, 1st Division troops and, at Gela, by Darby's Rangers. The Livorno Division attack was savagely repelled by the Rangers too. The Hermann Göring Division (General der Fallschirmtruppen Paul Conrath), starting out from Caltagirone in two columns, was very slow in moving and did not attack until 2 p.m. Its western column was met with devastating naval gun-fire and stopped at Piano Lupo; its eastern column collided head-on with 45th Division troops and, after a stiff fight, broke up in panic. Thus all Axis counter-attacks on D-Day failed.

D+1 was the crucial day in the fight for the Seventh Army's beaches. Guzzoni had ordered a renewal of the counter-attacks, but this time better co-ordinated. All day, the battle raged on the horseshoe-shaped plain of Gela and in the hills surrounding it.

The 33rd and 34th Regiments of the Livorno Division, striking towards Gela from the west, were repelled by naval artillery and mortar fire. This action completely finished the Livorno as a fighting force.

German planes bombing US shipping off Gela on July 11. Starting early on D-Day and continuing throughout D+1, the US landing fleet was attacked by German and Italian bombers and fighter-bombers which, amazingly, were able to operate almost without interruption from Allied fighters. Ships were forced to weigh anchor and disperse and many were damaged by near misses. On July 11, the Liberty ship *Robert Rowan* was hit off Gela and, after a huge explosion, sank. (US Army)

The plateau below where the photographer, Lieutenant Longini, stood has been completely filled with new houses and this is the best comparison possible today.

On D+1, a force of US paratroopers and some infantry of 45th Division, rounded up by the airborne assault commander, Colonel James M. Gavin, fought a vicious battle against a column of the Hermann Göring Division at Biazzo Ridge, near Biscari. Led by Gavin personally, the heavily-outgunned Americans held the ridge, stopped the enemy armour and precluded it from joining up with other columns for a counter-attack against the beaches. *Left:* **Sometime during the battle, Gavin was photographed talking to Jack H. 'Beaver' Thompson, war correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* who had jumped in Gavin's stick on D-Day. (US Army)** *Right:* **The picture was taken just to the rear of Biazzo Ridge at the railway crossing on Route 115.**

The Hermann Göring now attacked in three columns. The easternmost task force was held up all day south of Biscari by a vastly outnumbered force of paratroopers and 45th Division infantry, rounded up by Colonel J. M. Gavin, the US airborne assault leader, at a place called Biazzo Ridge. The centre force was again stopped at the Piano Lupo road-blocks. But the western task force, with some 60 tanks, succeeded in penetrating on to the Plain of Gela, overwhelming several 1st Division units and coming to within 2,000 yards of the sea. They were only stopped short of the beaches by deadly naval gun-fire and by a last-ditch stand of the 1st Division, assisted by beach engineers and by elements of 2nd Armored Division and artillery firing from among the dunes. Chased by naval guns, the Hermann Göring withdrew into the hills to the north, leaving behind 16 knocked-out panzers on the plain. In all, Conrath's division lost 43 tanks in two days.

The triumphant American stand at Gela was marred by tragedy that evening when, despite assurances that they would not be fired upon by friendly forces if they flew the prescribed route, the aerial convoy carrying the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment to Sicily was shot to pieces by Allied naval flak. The 2,000 paratroopers were to be dropped as reinforcements into the Gela bridgehead. Of 144 C-47s, 23 were lost and 37 severely damaged. In all, 61 crewmen died. Paratroop casualties were 81 killed, 133 wounded and 16 missing.

A little distance to the west, the Ponte Dirillo causeway and bridge lead Route 115 across the wide estuary of the Acate River. Vital for connecting the 1st and 45th Divisions beach-heads, it was seized on D-Day by 85 paratroopers from Company G of the 505th Parachute Infantry. On D+1, the paratroopers and the 2nd Battalion, 180th Infantry, who had joined them from the 45th Division beaches, were counter-attacked by the Hermann Göring column from Biscari. One company was forced to withdraw to the beaches, but the rest held their position until relieved. Just west of the bridge, at a small farmhouse along Route 115, is the 82nd Airborne Division monument. As the colour photo on our centre pages shows, its text suggests that Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Gorham, commander of the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry, was also killed at Ponte Dirillo. In actual fact, Gorham was killed further to the west, at Piano Lupo on July 12, by a direct hit from a Tiger tank whilst trying to knock it out with a bazooka.

On July 11, 3rd Division extended the Seventh Army's bridgehead westward from Licata. The 7th Infantry, after a stiff house-to-house fight, pushed the Italian defenders out of Palma di Montechiaro. Simultaneously, Combat Command A of 2nd Armored Division, attached to the 3rd, made a thrust to the next town, Naro. *Left:* **Signal Corps photographer Rusbin pictured a Priest of CCA's 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, mounting troops of 3rd Division, rumbling through Palma en route to Naro. (US Army)** *Right:* **Time has changed very little on Palma's main street, the Via G. B. Ordierna.**

Meanwhile, on the British front, 5th Division, leading 13 Corps' drive to the north along Route 114, had bumped into Kampfgruppe Schmalz on July 11 and been stopped. After that, the British had to fight for almost every town on the way to Catania. On July 12, 15th Brigade captured Melilli. Sergeant Silverside photographed the 2nd Wiltshires (of 13th Brigade) entering the town from the south. (IWM)

MONTGOMERY'S BID FOR CATANIA

By July 12, it was clear to Kesselring and Guzzoni that Sixth Army had no choice but to go over to the defensive. Only eastern Sicily was to be held, the western half had to be abandoned. Guzzoni planned to shorten his front to a line across the north-eastern corner of the island. The forces already in contact with the enemy were to withdraw to the eastern half of this line — from Catania to Nicosia — while those retreating from Palermo were to occupy the western half — from Nicosia to Santa Stefano on the north coast. The success of this manoeuvre depended on preventing an Allied breakthrough at the eastern hinge: Catania; and on a speedy link-up between Kampfgruppe Schmalz and the Hermann Göring Division. There was an 18-mile gap between the two formations.

Meanwhile, reinforcements were on the way. On July 11, Hitler had decided to send two divisions to Sicily: 29. Panzergrenadier--Divison, already in Italy, and 1. Fallschirmjäger-Division, stationed in southern France which was to be airlifted to Sicily at once. On the evening of July 12, its first contingent, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3, made a textbook drop south of Catania and was immediately transported south to come under control of Kampfgruppe Schmalz. Further airborne reinforcements were to arrive next day.

On July 10, Kampfgruppe Schmalz had stopped British 5th Division at Priolo, midway between Syracuse and Augusta. Realising his force was too small to hold indefinitely or to close the gap with him and the Hermann Göring Division, Oberst Wilhelm Schmalz had decided to fight a delaying action along the coastal highway (Route 114). All through July 11, he held up 5th Division. During the night he withdrew to a defensive line centred on Lentini. The withdrawal uncovered the port of Augusta and enabled 5th Division to enter the naval base next day. This was not 13 Corps' only success. The 50th Division, on the left, had moved north from Avola through Cassibile and Floridia and reached Sortini. Leese's 30 Corps had by then made even better gains: by D+1, it had cleared the entire Pachino peninsula of what little resistance remained; on July 12, 1st Canadian Division contacted US 45th Division at Ragusa and moved ten miles beyond to Giarratana; 51st Division advanced from Noto and took Palazollo Acreide; by dusk, 23rd Armoured Brigade, leading the division's advance, was outside Vizzini.

Made optimistic by these apparently easy gains, on July 12 Montgomery made a new plan. The plan of campaign for Sicily, vague as it was, assumed that, once a secure bridgehead had been established, both armies would advance northwards, with Seventh Army circling west around Mt Etna and Eighth Army pushing through between Etna and the east coast. This manoeuvre would cut the island in half, trap all enemy troops in western Sicily and encircle all Axis forces in the eastern part of it. Now, Montgomery felt he could do both pincers with Eighth Army alone. Instead of operating both 13 and 30 Corps on one axis along the east coast, he now decided to shift 30 Corps westward.

His main effort was still to be with Dempsey's 13 Corps: he sensed that if he acted quickly, it could gain the Catania plain by one rapid dash. To speed up that advance, he ordered two special operations, both designed to capture important bridges on the road to Catania: a commando landing was to secure a bridge at Lentini and an airborne landing the bridge just south of Catania, the Ponte Primosole. The 13 Corps new offensive was to start on July 13.

According to Montgomery's new plan, 30 Corps was at the same time to wheel inland for a swing around the west side of Mt Etna, via Enna, Leonforte and on to Nicosia and Randazzo. Without waiting for Alexander's approval, Montgomery directed Leese to send his divisions into the interior via Caltagirone, Enna and Leonforte.

For this change of mission, 30 Corps required Route 124, the Vizzini–Caltagirone highway, which belonged to Seventh Army. Montgomery, however, forgot to notify the Americans, both of his new plan and that he was going to move directly across their front, so that on July 13 a confused situation arose on Route 124 as both Bradley's II Corps and Leese's 30 Corps headed for the same objective, Vizzini. This episode became known as 'the great boundary dispute'. Alexander exacerbated the situation early on July 14, when, faced with a fait accompli by Montgomery, he post facto approved Monty's changed plans and issued a new directive that gave Route 124 to the British. It was a decision that has been controversial ever since. A recent historian called it 'the most misguided decision made by the Allies in Sicily'. First of all, when the order was given, 30 Corps had yet to capture Vizzini, whereas US 45th Division was within 1,000 yards of the disputed highway; was poised to strike at Vizzini; and in a much better position to seize Caltagirone than 30 Corps. Now they were forced to abandon the attack. Moreover, because they were not allowed to use Route 124 for their shift westwards, they had to return all the way to the beaches in order to get to their new sector.

The debris caused by Allied shelling has been removed and a new building now occupies the same site on Piazza San Sebastiano.

On the night of July 12-13, after the Italian garrison had fled northwards in complete disarray, 17th Brigade entered the naval port of Augusta unopposed. In fact, the Royal Navy had beat Eighth Army to Augusta: the destroyers *Exmoor* and *Kanaris* had actually sailed into the harbour before the troops arrived! *Left:* **Sergeant Mott recorded the damage wrought by Allied bombardment from air and sea. (IWM)** *Right:* **Today, Augusta is again a bustling naval port. For our matching shot on its main shopping street, the Via Principe Umberto, the distinctive tower on the left offered an easy reference point.**

Secondly, Monty's move also proved to be very much based on premature optimism. The 30 Corps plan was for 51st Division to take Vizzini after which 1st Canadian Division was to pass through them and capture Caltagirone. Vizzini, however, proved a tough nut to crack. Perched high on a knife-like ridge, it was the first of many such natural fortresses on which the Germans anchored their defence of Sicily. Its possession was vital to them to ensure a successful escape of the Hermann Göring Division to the east and for two days the divisional recce battalion and a panzergrenadier battalion stubbornly withstood every 51st Division assault. When Vizzini finally fell and the Canadians, on July 15, began their advance along Route 124, they were held up at Grammichelle. Again, although still in a perfect position to support the Canadians, the American artillery could do nothing because they had been given strict instructions not to fire within one mile of the road, lest they accidentally shell British forces.

On a larger plan, Montgomery's new scheme gave Eighth Army the use of all the roads leading to Messina and restricted Seventh Army's activities to the south-western part of the island. In effect it relegated the rôle of the Americans to that of protecting the British left flank. Not surprisingly, Patton, Bradley and the other American commanders were outraged at Alexander's decision, but Patton accepted it with uncharacteristic meekness.

British 13 Corps offensive, Montgomery's bid for Catania, began on July 13 when 50th Division, reinforced by 4th Armoured Brigade, launched its drive north from Sortini. However, when his division did not get past Mt Pancali, strongly defended by Kampfgruppe Schmalz, General Kirkman realised he would not be able to keep his timetable for relief of the commando force and airborne force about to land in front of him. That evening, No. 3 Commando landed behind enemy lines in the Bay of Agnone. Fighting their way across country through Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3, they reached and seized the Ponte dei Malati bridge, three miles north of Lentini, about 3 a.m. on July 14 and removed the demolition charges. Heavily counter-attacked and with steadily rising casualties, the commandos stubbornly clung to the bridge until, finally, they were driven off in the afternoon. The survivors broke into small groups and made their way south.

Shortly after, 50th Division reached the site. They had again been held up all day, this time at Lentini. Fortunately, the hastily retreating Germans had not had time to destroy the bridge and the British were able to recapture it intact.

The night before and ten miles to the north, British 1st Parachute Brigade had dropped around the Ponte Primosole bridge on the far side of the Simeto River. As bad luck would have it, only a few hours earlier, Fallschirmjäger-MG-Batallion 1 (the 1. Fallschirmjäger-Divison's second contingent) had airlanded on Catania airfield and taken up position just south of the bridge, almost on top of one of the planned British drop zones.

Villasmundo, six miles inland from Augusta, was taken by 15th Brigade on July 13. *Left:* **While an artillery unit moves through the town, signallers repair the telephone lines. Photo by Sergeant Loughlin. (IWM)** *Right:* **For once, time has considerably changed the appearance of a place in Sicily. Yet this is the same corner of Villasmundo, identified by an aged local who recognised the distinctive chimney (on the right of the 1943 picture) as that of the only bakery in the village at the time.**

Left: **'No. 3 Commando Bridge', the Ponte dei Malati across the Lentini River on the main road to Catania. On the night of July 13-14, No. 3 Commando (Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Durnford-Slater) landed behind enemy lines and, after a cross-country fighting march, attacked the bridge from this spot, successfully overwhelming the occupants of the four pillboxes that guarded this end. They removed the charges, but, with the Germans counter-attacking at once with mortars and a Tiger tank, could not take the southern end. After holding out for the better part of the day, and with no sign of the relieving 50th Division, the survivors were forced to break into small groups and make their way to friendly lines. The Commando had paid a high price: 28 killed, 66 wounded and 59 missing, but their stand had precluded the Germans from destroying the bridge. About 5 p.m., the 5th East Yorks reached the bridge on the heels of the retreating Germans and seized it intact. In recent years, a new bridge has been built alongside the old one.** *Right:* **After the action, Montgomery ordered Durnford-Slater: 'I want you to get the best stonemason in the town. I want you to have him engrave "No. 3 Commando Bridge" on a good piece of stone. Have this stone built into the masonry of the bridge.' In fact, two identical plaques, one for each parapet, were made and cemented in. Both remain to this day, unnoticed by anyone crossing this forgotten bridge in a deserted and bleak part of Sicily.**

The Primosole operation was the fourth Allied airborne débâcle in Sicily. Fired on by friendly naval vessels and heavy enemy flak along the coast, the troop carriers completely lost formation. Of 126 paratrooper planes, only 39 dropped their loads within a mile of the DZs. Of the 19 gliders, only four landed near the bridge. Of a total of 1,856, only 295 men reached the objective, yet these troops captured the bridge and occupied the high ground south of it.

The German paratroopers (the MG battalion on the south bank and, later in the day, the divisional signal company — the third contingent to airland) reacted in a savage manner. Still the little band of British Red Devils managed to hold on to the bridge all day long. At nightfall they withdrew to a ridge on the south bank of the river where they could cover the bridge with fire and prevent the Germans from damaging it.

Meanwhile, further south, Oberst Schmalz had decided to evacuate the Lentini positions. Starting on July 14, he pulled back in two steps to behind the Simeto River. (One of his units, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3, found its escape route blocked. Forced to leave behind all its heavy weapons and transport, and marching stealthily at night, they did not regain friendly lines until July 17.)

This opened the way for 13 Corps. At about 7.30 p.m. on July 14, the first Sherman of the 44th Royal Tanks, leading 50th Division's drive, reached the besieged paras. The first infantry arrived two hours later. However, they were dog-tired after a 20 miles' march and in no shape for a swift strike against the bridge.

That evening, Fallschirmjäger-Pionier-Bataillon 1 (the fourth contingent) jumped over Catania airfield and strengthened the German perimeter around both ends of the contested bridge.

Next morning, a conventional frontal infantry assault by the 9th Durham Light Infantry was cut to pieces by the German paratroopers. The Durhams lost 100 men, including 34 killed.

Officers of the Para Brigade who had observed the failure convinced the tank/infantry commanders to abandon a second daylight attempt. Lieutenant-Colonel A. Pearson of 1 Para knew a place, 400 yards upstream, where the Simeto could be forded and that night led the 8th DLI across. The attack caught the Germans by surprise and the Durhams gained a foothold at the northern end of the bridge. But that was all. Tanks that tried to reinforce them after dawn were knocked out by 88mms firing point-blank. All through the 16th, fierce hand to hand fighting raged in the vineyards and orange groves north of the river.

On the night of July 16-17, the 6th and 9th Durhams crossed by way of the same ford. The German positions were bolstered too by the arrival of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 4 which had jumped that evening. Throughout the 17th the vicious battle continued.

After three days of savage combat, the 50th Division's bridgehead extended a mere 1,000 yards north of the bridge. By then, the Germans had made Route 114 north of the bridge into a real death trap and established a strong defence line along a sunken lateral road, the Fosso Bottaceto. An attack by

The Primosole Bridge across the Simeto River — where Eighth Army fought its bitterest battle of the whole Sicilian campaign; where British 'Red Devil' paratroops fought German 'Green Devil' Fallschirmjäger; where Montgomery's drive to Catania was stopped cold, seven miles from the objective.

The distinctive 400-foot-long, box-type girder bridge has been replaced by a nondescript modern structure. This is the southern end, where today there is a junction of the old and new Route 114. The original route ran from Augusta to Catania via Lentini; today a new coastal motorway connects the two cities.

Left: **The Primosole Bridge was first seized by 1st Parachute Brigade, who dropped on the night of July 13-14, but were forced to give it up the next evening. After 50th Division had relieved the paras, a frontal daylight attack by 151st Durham Brigade on July 15 against the defending Fallschirmjäger ended in a bloody disaster. Three days of further fighting accomplished nothing.** *Right:* **The memorial of the 10th Berkshires, located just north of the bridge. The Berkshires replaced the Durhams on July 17 and had their baptism of fire that same night in an attack that suffered high losses and brought little gains.**

168th Brigade on the night of July 17-18 made little headway. The battle for Primosole bridge had ended in stalemate. The Germans left some 300 dead on the battlefield and 155 were taken prisoner. The 151st Durham Brigade alone had lost 500 killed, wounded and missing. Montgomery's bid for Catania had failed. For the next three weeks, the line here would remain unchanged.

When it became clear that 13 Corps' breakthrough would not come off, Montgomery shifted his attention to the 'left hook' around Mt Etna by 30 Corps. The Canadians, who had taken Caltagirone on the 15th and Piazza Armerina on the 17th were to continue their push towards Enna and Leonforte. Brought up on the Canadians' right, 231st Brigade was to aim for Agira and 51st Division was directed to cross the Dittaino River, capture the vital Gerbini airfields and advance on Paterno. To keep up pressure on 13 Corps' front, 5th Division was ordered around the left flank of the exhausted 50th Division and attack Misterbianco, a town just west of Catania.

However, by now, the German position was very strong. On July 15, Kampfgruppe Schmalz had finally contacted the Hermann Göring Division and the two formations now occupied a continuous line along the Simeto and its tributary, the Dittaino.

On July 19, 5th Division crossed the Simeto under heavy fire, but was unable to break out or reach Misterbianco. Further west, 51st Division established two small bridgeheads over the Dittaino, one at Sferro and one at Gerbini. At Sferro, the Hermann Görings effectively blocked any further advance. At Gerbini, the Highlanders attacked the aerodrome on the 20th, but were thrown back next day to positions south of it by a strong counter-attack. On July 21, Montgomery issued instructions for all formations of Eighth Army, except 1st Canadian Division, to assume a defensive rôle along the line of the Dittaino/Simeto river.

It had finally become apparent to Montgomery that his army was not strong enough to encircle Mt Etna on both sides. Accordingly, he got Alexander's permission to bring in his reserve, 78th Division, from Sousse in Tunisia. He planned to commit it in the 30 Corps zone. If sufficient pressure could be brought to bear there, he felt, the Germans would have to withdraw from their Catania positions. The 78th Division, however, would not be ready before August 1. On that date, Montgomery hoped to start his final offensive.

Until then, 13 Corps was to confine itself to patrol activity to keep the Germans pinned down at Catania.

For 30 Corps there was yet another change. It was to continue pushing 1st Canadian Division around Mt Etna — not however through Leonforte, Nicosia and Randazzo, as originally planned, but closer in, through Leonforte, Agira and Regalbuto.

This sudden turn from north to north-east meant the Canadians would bypass the strong point town of Enna. However, on their left, US II Corps was pushing north to the high ground around Caltanissetta and the bypassing of Enna would leave a dangerous threat to the American right flank. There was some confusion before Bradley and Leese had cleared the question as to who was responsible for the capture of the old citadel town. The Americans wasted no time in emptying the pocket and 1st Division took Enna on the 20th.

From July 18-21, the 51st Division fought a grim battle with the Hermann Göring Division for entry into the Catania plain at Sferro, a small railway shunting-yard village. After crossing the Dittaino River, the Highlanders were pinned down for a full day before finally entering the village. Unable to get any further, on the 21st the division was ordered to go over on the defensive. The memorial overlooking the Sferro battlefield *(see centre pages)* **was constructed immediately after the end of the Sicilian campaign and unveiled on November 4, 1943, just before the 51st left the Mediterranean for Britain.**

The capture of the harbour town of Porto Empedocle by the 3rd Rangers on July 16, was the introduction to and logistical pre-requisite of Seventh Army's drive into western Sicily and to Palermo. Here, a DUKW — another amphibious craft used for the first time in the invasion of Sicily — loaded with supplies for the 3rd Division's 7th Infantry, climbs the main road out of the harbour towards Route 115. (US Army)

PATTON'S DASH FOR PALERMO

While Montgomery was struggling in the east, Patton was looking for a chance to unleash his army. The defensive rôle to which his troops had been relegated while Eighth Army carried the main offensive irked Patton. He had set his mind on a drive to Palermo and for that he needed both the road centre of Agrigento and its nearby harbour, Porto Empedocle. Agrigento was the gateway to western Sicily and Porto Empedocle, with a daily capacity of 800 tons, could well supply a western drive.

Patton had asked Alexander for permission to expand his operations to the west, towards Agrigento. Alexander, fearing Patton might become involved in a costly battle which might expose Eighth Army's left flank, forbade Patton to attack in strength, but he had no objections to 'a reconnaissance in force'.

On July 14, Patton visited his 3rd Division and explained his problem to General Truscott. Truscott understood perfectly well how to interpret 'a reconnaissance in force'. Two days later, 3rd Division and the 3rd Rangers were in possession of both towns.

On July 17, Patton flew to Alexander's headquarters in Tunis and presented his army group commander with a draft plan for an enveloping attack on Palermo. Caught off guard, Alexander reluctantly agreed to a Seventh Army drive to cut the island in two in conjunction with operations in western Sicily and towards Palermo.

Patton lost no time in ordering an agressive push across the 100 miles of rugged terrain to Palermo. On July 15, he had formed a Provisional Corps under his deputy commander, Major General G. Keyes, consisting of 3rd Infantry, 82nd Airborne and 2nd Armored Divisions, the 39th Infantry of 9th Division and Darby's Rangers.

The drive started on July 19. The advance turned out to be little more than a road march. On the first day, 82nd Division (Major General M. B. Ridgway) advanced 25 miles against only spotty resistance. Next day, they were in possession of Sciacca and another 20 miles nearer to Palermo. On July 21, Task Force X (composed of Darby's Rangers reinforced by artillery and the 39th Infantry) raced to Castelvetrano, then northwards to Salemi and Alcamo. By then, Keyes had ordered 2nd Armored Division (Major General H. J. Gaffey) to assemble for a

New houses have been added to Via Spinola. If it was not for the wartime picture to prove it, one would not believe that the houses on the left are much younger than the ones on the right.

Left: **July 22: after an all-night march, the 505th Parachute Infantry enters San Margherita de Belice as part of Seventh Army's spectacular sweep through western Sicily. (US Army)**
Right: **San Margherita, the village made famous by Giuseppe di Lampedusa's novel 'Il Gattopardo', was completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1968 which obliterated all houses on its main street. Although much of the debris has been cleared, most of the villagers, unbelievably, still live in the emergency Nissen huts built immediately after the catastrophe. Today, reconstruction is progressing in rapid tempo.**

thrust to Palermo. Meanwhile, Truscott's 3rd Division, in an amazing feat of marching ability under the most gruelling conditions, had slashed its way northwards to Corleone and then to the outskirts of Palermo.

On July 22, Palermo fell without a fight. That day, both 2nd Armored and 3rd Divisions entered the great city, both units later claiming the honour of having arrived first.

Next day, the Provisional Corps cleared the western corner of Sicily and the now isolated ports of Marsala, Trapani and Castellammare fell without opposition. At a cost of 272 casualties (57 killed, 170 wounded, 45 missing), the corps had captured 53,000 of the enemy, mostly Italians, and killed or wounded another 2,900. It had captured 189 guns, 359 vehicles and 41 tanks. On July 28, the first Allied supply ships entered Palermo harbour.

The Palermo adventure might have developed very differently had it not been for Patton's Chief-of-Staff, Brigadier General H. R. Gay. The day after his verbal approval of Patton's plan, Alexander sent a written confirmation which however significantly altered the terms under which Patton could drive on Palermo. It stated that he was *first* to drive north from Petralia and cut Sicily in two, *before* taking on Palermo. This was to protect Montgomery's left hook around Mt Etna. Although Patton was present at his CP when the cable arrived, General Gay, on his own initiative decided to withhold the telegram from him. He cabled 15 Army Group that the message had been garbled in transmission and asked for a repeat. By the time this was completed, Seventh Army was on the outskirts of Palermo.

While the Provisional Corps swept through western Sicily, Bradley's II Corps drove north across the centre of the island with 45th Division on the left and 1st Division on the right.

Advancing along Route 121, 45th Division initially aimed for Palermo too. Middleton's men were already in Villafrati when, on July 22, the inter-corps boundary was changed and Route 121 given to the Provisional Corps. Shifting from north-west to north, 45th Division on July 23 reached the northern coast near Termini Imerese.

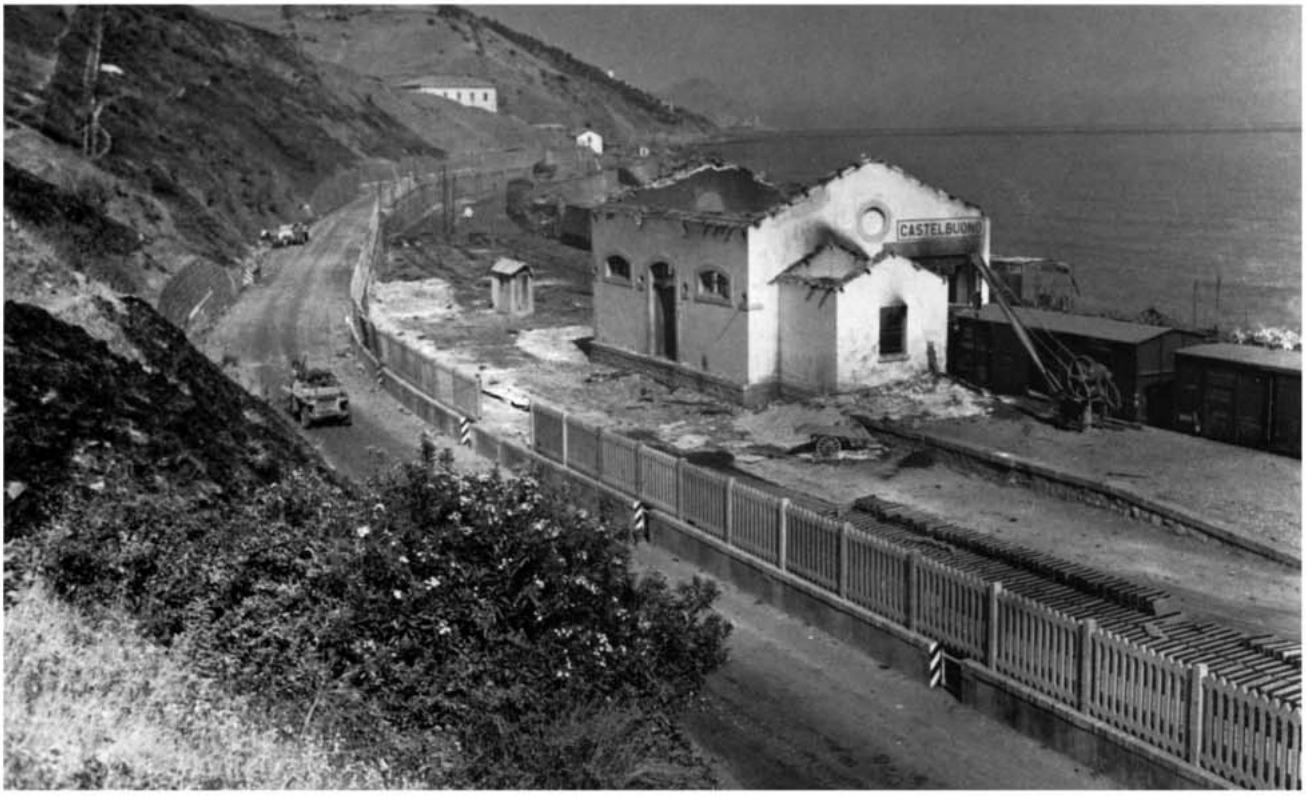
Allen's 1st Division, after taking Enna on the 20th, pushed slowly north towards Petralia. Its advance was less rapid and spectacular than that of other US divisions because of greater opposition from Rodt's retreating 15. Panzergrenadier-Division. Petralia, which was reached on July 23, was as far north as 1st Division would go, for on that day Seventh Army's axis of advance was changed again, this time to the east.

On July 22, Combat Command A of 2nd Armored Division rolled into Palermo from the south-west. When Karel came to look for the spot of this picture taken by Corporal Osborne of the US Signal Corps, he discovered that like most pictures captioned 'American troops enter Palermo' it was actually not taken in Palermo proper, but at Monreale, the cathedral town which overlooks the great harbour city. (US Army)

When we first visited Monreale in 1986, the distinctive window grille on the right was still in place. Since then, the grille has gone and the arched doors to its left and right have been modernised.

The capital of Sicily falls. *Left:* Among those recording the 2nd Armored triumphal entry at Monreale was *Life* photographer Robert Capa who took this picture of a column led by an amphibious jeep of the 17th Armored Engineer Battalion. *Above right:* Forty-nine years later Signor Messina is still in business. *Right:* A White M3A1 scout car, carrying a white flag, stops outside Palermo's Royal Palace prior to the surrender of the city. Both US 3rd Division and 2nd Armored Division claim to have entered Palermo first. The 3rd Division claims patrols of its 7th Infantry were inside the city at 2 p.m., while 2nd Armored claims the prize for a patrol of the 82nd Reconnaissance Battalion, insisting no other Americans were found inside the city during their foray. In the early afternoon of the 22nd, a delegation of civilians arrived at the 7th Infantry command post and offered to surrender the city to Brigadier General W. B. Eagles, the 3rd Division assistant commander. Eagles had instructions that only General Keyes, the Provisional Corps' commander, was to accept the surrender and he declined. Late in the afternoon, a patrol of CCA returned with Generale di Brigate Giuseppe Molinero, the commander of Port Defence 'N' (Palermo) who offered to surrender the city to Keyes. Together with the Italian general, General Keyes and Major General Gaffey, the 2nd Armored Division commander, entered Palermo and formally accepted the surrender at the Royal Palace shortly after 7 p.m. (US Army)

Left: A US half-track patrols Corso Vittoria Emanuele in the heart of Palermo. (US Army) Before its capture, Palermo had suffered numerous air attacks by Allied bombers. In the weeks preceding the invasion, the Allied air forces had kept the harbour city under almost continuous bombardment. *Right:* At Palermo today, bomb damage is still visible. Behind the façade of Palazzo Riso-Belmonte, in the centre of the picture, lies only an abandoned ruin, fire-blackened and full of debris.



After it had reached the north coast near Termini Imerese, US 45th Division turned east for a push along Route 113 towards Messina. However, 29. Panzergrenadier-Division, making full use of a terrain that favoured defenders, blocked the coastal road at successive ridge and river lines and by the end of July, when they were relieved by 3rd Division, the 45th had only advanced as far as Santa Stefano. On July 24, Lieutenant Wever photographed a jeep patrol of the Thunderbird Division at Castelbuono Station, between Cefalù and Santa Stefano. (US Army)

THE ETNA LINE AND THE RACE TO MESSINA

In a new instruction to Seventh Army, Alexander ordered it to join in a drive on Messina. Patton was to employ his maximum strength along two parallel roads to the east: Route 113, along the northern coast; and the inland highway, Route 120, through Nicosia, Troina and Randazzo. Alexander had decided to place Seventh Army on equal footing with the Eighth. Messina now became the objective of both armies.

Although Montgomery, at a commanders' conference at his HQ at Cassibile on July 25, actually suggested to Patton that Seventh Army take Messina rather than his Eighth, Patton remained deeply suspicious and continued to regard the drive on Messina as a contest of adversaries, 'a horse race at which the prestige of the US Army is at stake'. Patton assigned his new mission to Bradley's II Corps. Between and parallel to the two roads that formed the corps' new axes of advance lay the rugged Caronie mountains. This mountain chain completely separated the two drives and made them into two distinct operations, unable to support one another except at the few lateral roads.

By then, the situation on the Axis side had changed considerably. The German commanders in Italy were by now convinced that Sicily could not be held for an extended period and that little would be gained from a needless sacrifice of German formations. Even though Kesselring was telling Mussolini that everything possible would be done to hold Sicily, the real German intentions were to establish a bridgehead in the north-east which would later permit a deliberate evacuation of the island. Consequently, on July 14, the headquarters of XIV. Panzerkorps (General der Panzertruppen Hans-Valentin Hube) was ordered to cross the Messina Strait and assume command of all German forces on the island. Hube and his staff moved to Sicily on July 16 and 17. His task was to fight a delaying action and gain further time for preparing the defences on the Italian mainland.

Officially, Hube was under command of HQ Italian Sixth Army, but in actual practice the relationship was reversed and in the remaining weeks of the campaign orders were channelled directly from Kesselring to XIV. Panzerkorps. Nominally, Guzzoni remained in command until August 9 but in fact, a special directive from Hitler, to be kept secret from the Italians, had instructed Hube to take over the overall leadership in Sicily, while unobstrusively excluding the Italian headquarters.

Kesselring had also realised that, with Italian resistance dwindling, the two-and-a-half German divisions in Sicily (the Hermann Göring, now united with Kampfgruppe Schmalz and with units of 1. Fallschirmjäger-Division under its command, and the 15. Panzergrenadier-Division) were not strong enough to withstand two well-equipped Allied armies. Although the Germans' main concern, in the first week after the invasion, had been to establish and maintain a continuous defensive line running from Catania westward, it was apparent to them that a collapse of Italian resistance in the west would leave this line with an exposed

Nicely repaired, the small station again serves the coastal railway.

While 45th Division advanced along the coast road, US 1st Division pushed along a parallel axis further south, along Route 120, through some of the most rugged and inacessible terrain in Sicily. On July 28, after a four-day fight with Kampfgruppe Fullriede of 15. Panzergrenadier-Division, they captured Nicosia. *Left:* **Doughboys of the 16th Infantry take a rest in the shade of the debris-littered town hall.** *Right:* **The statue has been moved and altered. Today it stands in front of the town's Carabinieri (Italian para-military police) station.**

right flank and provide the Allies with an open avenue to Messina. Although 15. Panzergrenadier-Division (Generalmajor Eberhard Rodt) had lengthened its right wing with weak elements towards the northern coast, Kesselring needed another division to fill the gap between that division and the sea. Accordingly, he had asked for 29. Panzergrenadier-Division to be moved from Calabria to Sicily. Its final transfer to Sicily was held up by Hitler who feared that supplies on the island might be insufficient for another formation, but on July 18 the bulk of its Panzergrenadier-Regiment 15 crossed, followed four days later by the remainder of the division.

Thus, when the US 45th Division, on the northern coast, turned east into Route 113, they bumped headlong into the 29. Panzergrenadier-Division (Generalmajor Walter Fries). The coastal road ran along a narrow strip between the mountains and the sea and crossed numerous streams running down from the mountain crest between high steep ridges. These ridge and river combinations were as many natural defence lines and the Germans made full use of them, adding demolitions and minefields.

Fries' panzergrenadiers stopped 45th Division three times: first on July 23 at the Rocella River, then on July 25 at the Pollina River and again, next day, on the Tusa River line, just west of Santa Stefano. Each time they stubbornly and very skillfully defended the river/ridge line as long as possible and each time the Americans had to fight hard to gain river crossings or to drive the enemy off mountain peaks. Often the Germans counter-attacked, often they could only be dislodged by very heavy shelling. Fries was conceding ground in conjunction with Rodt's 15. Panzergrenadier-Division fighting further to the south, even though there were instances where he could easily have held his positions for a little longer.

By July 31, after a solid week of bloody fighting, 45th Division had only advanced as far as the town of Santa Stefano.

Further inland, 1st Division was struggling east along Route 120. Somewhat different from the coast road, Route 120 was narrow and crooked with steep gradients and sharp turns and dominated by mountains on both sides. Blocking the way was 15. Panzergrenadier-Division.

After three days of determined fighting, 1st Division took Nicosia on the 28th and pressed onwards on the 31st, expecting to take the next hilltop towns, Cerami and Troina, without much trouble. However, for the Germans, Troina was a key town in the now-forming Etna Line and, undetected by American intelligence, General Hube had ordered Rodt to make a supreme effort to hold it.

On August 1, the first American attack, by the 39th Infantry (attached from 9th Division), had a promising start, but was completely thrown back by surprise counter-attacks in the evening. Next day, they tried again, this time supported on the left by the 26th Infantry and the French-Morrocan 4th Tabor of Goums. All attacks failed under a devastating hail of German artillery fire. Next came an all-out night attack across the entire 1st Division front. It gained only one to two miles. August 4 saw the most determined effort to take Troina. Before the attack, nine artillery battalions and 72 fighter-bombers battered the town and its defenders but still the Germans held off an American breakthrough. Finally, on August 5, Allen sent the newly-attached 60th Infantry (also from 9th Division) in a flanking movement around the north to threathen the enemy artillery positions and cut the road at Cesaro, behind the Germans.

Rodt was well aware of this threat to his escape route and during the night his exhausted men, having held the enemy for five days, slipped away from Troina. Next day, 1st Division found the ruins abandoned.

That same day, by an unfortunate coincidence, an order arrived relieving General Allen of his command. It had nothing to do with his handling of the division or his performance in Sicily (Eisenhower had simply decided Allen needed a respite from combat), but coming on the heels of the Troina battle, it fell very badly with the men of the 'Big Red One'.

When on July 23, General Hube committed 29. Panzergrenadier-Division on the north coast highway, he plugged the last remaining gap in the line he had been forming across the north-eastern corner of Sicily since July 14. Called the Etna Line, or 'Hube Line', it started at Catania on the east coast and circled south around Mt Etna to the north coast. Defending it from south to north were Conrath's Hermann Göring Division (with attached Fallschirmjäger), Rodt's 15. Panzergrenadier-Division and Fries' 29. Panzergrenadier-Division. Interspersed here and there were remnants of the Italian Aosta and Livorno Divisions.

The Etna Line anchored on a series of key towns, the fall of either of which could unhinge the whole position. From north to south these were San Fratello, Troina, Adrano and Catania. The first three of these were each guarded by one or more outpost positions. At San Fratello it had been the Santa Stefano position and at Troina it had been Nicosia. Adrano had no less than four such outposts. To the west and blocking Route 121 were Agira and, closer in along the same highway, Regalbuto; to the south-west Centuripe, and to the south-east Paterno. All these inland towns were natural fortresses built on mountain tops, and Hube had ordered that each be held as long as possible.

On August 3, at the 15th Evacuation Hospital located 'somewhere near Nicosia', there occurred the first of the two notorious 'face-slapping incidents' (the second happened a week later) in which Patton used violence and abuse against two soldiers suffering from combat fatigue, incidents which almost ruined his career when they became known to the American public some time later. In the aftermath, Eisenhower forced Patton to apologise to the troops. *Above:* **Patton delivering his regrets to the 1st Division on August 27. (US Army)**

Troina has been described as 'Seventh Army's most bitterly contested battle of the Sicilian campaign'. From August 1-6, this hilltop town, made into a strongpoint by 15. Panzer-grenadier-Division, was under relentless attack by infantry of the 1st Division and two regiments of the 9th Division, backed up by nine artillery battalions and air support from bombers and fighter-bombers. After holding out stubbornly for five days and launching no fewer than 25 counter-attacks, the Germans pulled out on the night of August 5-6. Next morning the Americans found Troina empty. *Above:* **A patrol of the 16th Infantry ventures into the battered town. (US Army)** *Below:* **No fear of snipers on Via San Silvestro today.**

In planning his defence of the Etna Line, Hube took even less account of the Italians than before. The Axis relationship had seen a significant change because of political happenings in Rome. The Italian people had long since grown weary of the war, and now the military, and even his own Fascist party, had lost faith in their Duce. On July 25, triggered by the Italian disasters in Sicily and by the first Allied bombing raids on Rome, Mussolini was dismissed by King Victor Emmanuel III and replaced by an old chief of Commando Supremo, Marshal Pietro Badoglio *(see page 38)*.

Even though Badoglio declared that Italy would continue the war on Germany's side, the desintegration of Fascism, if anything, only strengthened German mistrust of their ally and heightened defeatism among Italian troops. As a consequence, for the rest of the campaign, the Germans acted alone.

OF THE 51ST HIGHLAND DIVISION
DURING THE
10TH JULY
THIS MEMORIAL
OF

AIRBORNE
AA
THIS SITE
THE NIGHT OF JULY 10 1943 WAS WITNESS
TO BLOODY COMBAT BETWEEN
THE 82nd AMERICAN AIRBORNE DIV. AND
ITALIAN AND GERMAN TROOPS EXTREME
WERE THE LOSSES SUPREME WAS THE
HEROISM AND FROM THE SACRIFICE OF
THESE MEN IS CREATED THE NEW HISTORY
OF EUROPE.
KILLED IN ACTION AT PONTE DIRILLO
Lt. Col. ARTHUR GORHAM
1st Lt. KURT B. KLEE
1st Lt. JOHN D. SPRINKLE
Navy Ensign G. A. HULTON
Sgt. GERALD L. LUDLAM
. . TRAFFORD WILLIAMS
. . JOHN F. YEAGER
Cpl. HOWARD S. OWENS
. . CHARLES F. CYMERYS
. . CORNELIUS J. MOYNIHAM, Jr.
. . WARREN LYONS
PFC. THOMAS D. ADAMS
. . THOMAS PLAKA
. . GEORGE H. GOUSMAN
. . ALOYSIUS BONCYK
. . ARTHUR H. NOUSER
. . HAROLD MYRHOW
. . NOEL M. WHEALTON
. . ELAND LAYE
. . MICHAEL A. SGAMBELLURI
PFC. HARRY C. DOWNEY
Pvt. JOHN J. McGUIGAN
. . DAVID J. McKEOWN
. . WILLIAM J. KERRIGAN
. . VERNON F. KNIGHT
. . PHILLIP V. PALMER
. . STEPHEN W. VIDUMSKY
. . RAYMOND E. FISKE
. . JAMES T. BRADFORD
. . ELDRIDGE V. HARBIN
. . JAMES R. HARRIS
. . DOMINIC T. ANGELO
. . ALFRED GLASCOCK
. . CARROLL NEILE
. . JAMES D. LONG
. . WALTER M. BARNETT
. . WALTER F. KISSALL
. . JOE BOOTHE
. . WILLIAM BLAKE

What Troina was for the Americans, Agira, in the same mountains but further south, was for the Canadians. Advancing towards Agira from the west, 1st Canadian Division were delayed for five days by fiercely-defending panzergrenadiers of Regiment 104 (15. Panzergrenadier-Division) and, from July 27, of I. Batallion, Regiment 15 (29. Panzergrenadier-Division).

Meanwhile British 231st Brigade, in a supportive attack from the south, cut the main road east of the town on the night of July 24-25 and the three succeeding nights, being forced to withdraw each morning by an enemy determined to keep his escape route open. When Agira fell, on the 28th, the Germans had lost 325 men killed, the Allies some 740. (IWM)

Left: After Agira came Regalbuto. It fell to the 1st Canadian and 231st Brigades on August 2, after a dogged fight with Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3. Smashed by Allied bombing and shelling, Regalbuto was more destroyed than any other town in Sicily. (AP) *Above:* The best comparison possible today.

South-east of Regalbuto, on a 2,000-foot-high mountain crest, lies Centuripe, made into a bastion by II. Batallion of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3. From the south, it had only one approach road, steep and twisting and much cratered. British 78th Division first assaulted along it on the night of August 1-2. Leading troops of 36th Brigade entered the town, but found its fortified houses strongly held and were forced to withdraw at dawn. Not until August 2 did 38th Irish Brigade launch an uphill assault that reached the town. Still, the Fallschirmjäger defended to the last and counter-attacked twice during the night before finally giving up. On the morning of the 3rd, Sergeant Wacket pictured Bren carriers bringing up supplies. (IWM)

While US II Corps struggled eastwards along its two axes of advance, 1st Canadian Division, helped by 231st Brigade, did the same along Route 121 to Adrano. After taking Leonforte on July 22, they took six days to fight their way to and into Agira against stubbornly-fighting troops of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3 and, later, 15. Panzergrenadier-Division. By the time they entered it, on the 28th, the enemy had gone.

Further south, the Canadians had gained a crossing over the Dittaino River and gone on to capture Catenanuova early on July 30. Into this bridgehead was brought 78th Division (Major-General V. Evelegh) which had arrived from North Africa.

Thus, on the morning of July 31, Eighth Army started its long-awaited new offensive. While 13 Corps feigned an attack towards Catania to deceive the Germans, the main effort was on the left by 30 Corps and aimed at Adrano. The 78th Division thrust north from the Catenanuova bridgehead towards that town via Centuripe. At the same time, the Canadians and 231st Brigade continued east along Route 121 towards the same objective via Regalbuto.

Regalbuto fell on August 2, after five days of bitter fighting. Centuripe, built on a very steep mountain peak and reached by a single twisting road, held out until August 3. The 78th Division first entered it on the night of August 1-2, but was thrown out and for two days sweated it out on the steep slopes below the town, before successfully storming it anew. Converging on Adrano, both 78th and 1st Canadian Divisions crossed the Salso, then the Simeto Rivers. In the face of strong resistance, 78th Division pressed the attack on the key town.

With the fall of Adrano imminent, Hube decided the time had come to withdraw to a shortened Etna Line. Consequently, the Hermann Göring Division began to evacuate Catania on August 4, abandoning the line they had held for three solid weeks and withdrawing to new positions near Acireale. Next, during the night of August 5-6, 15. Panzergrenadier-Division, as already mentioned, pulled out of Troina and moved back to Cesaro. The following night, Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3 finally gave up Adrano. Only 29. Panzergrenadier-Division, still holding firmly at San Fratello, was told to hold until forced to withdraw.

Men of the 6th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers look down from Centuripe to the Catania plain. The mound at the end of the ridge is Monte Calvario, 'Hill 718'. (IWM)

Thus, one by one, the key towns of the Etna Line fell to the Allies: on the 5th, the 50th Division entered Catania and 5th Division Misterbianco; on the 6th, the 5th Division occupied Paterno, 51st Division Biancavilla and US 1st Division Troina; and on the 7th, the 78th Division captured Adrano. The Etna Line had been broken.

Paterno, ten miles east of Centuripe and on the south-western slopes of the Etna massif, fell on August 6 to the 5th Division's 13th Brigade and tanks of the Canadian Ontario Regiment.

Left: **Sergeant Loughlin pictured a patrol of the 2nd Wiltshires climbing the steps to the monastery of Santa Maria dall'Arte that overlooks the town. (IWM)** *Right:* **The steps today.**

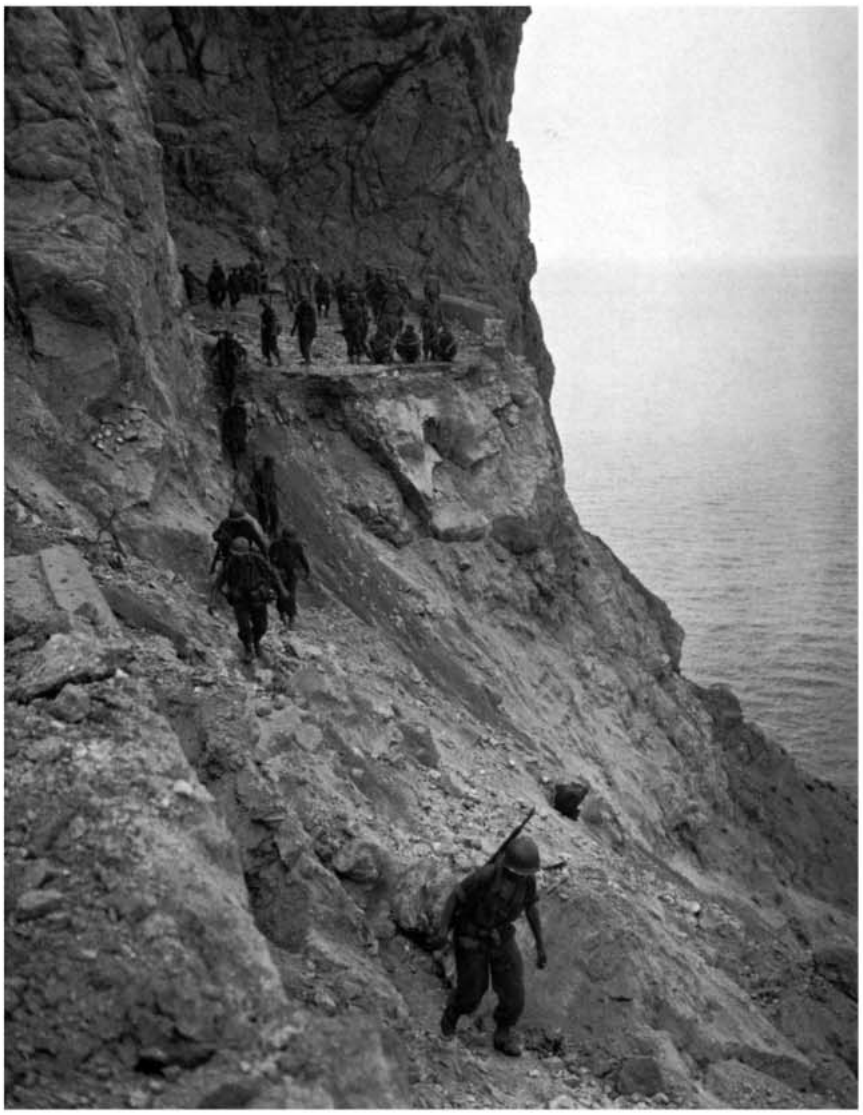
Agira, Regalbuto, Centuripe and Paterno were all part of the Eighth Army's effort to unhinge the Etna Line and break the German hold on the Plain of Catania. As these fortresses fell, the German blocking position at Catania became untenable. On August 4, the Hermann Göring Division abandoned the city and withdrew to the north. The following morning, 50th Division, led by 151st Brigade, entered it unopposed. Here Shermans of the 44th Royal Tanks roll through Via Garibaldi and into the cathedral square. Note the 50th Division's double-T ('Tyne and Tees') sign painted on the immobilised streetcar. (IWM)

Left: Not far away, according to the official caption, Sergeant Gladstone pictured 'men of 2/4 Hampshire Regiment'. However, Gladstone must have misheard when he asked the patrol for its unit, for no battalion of that name took part in the Sicilian campaign. More likely, they belonged to the 2nd *Northhamptonshire* Regiment of 5th Division's 17th Brigade. (IWM) *Right:* Except for the iron girders to support the crumbling archways, Piazza Mazzini remains unchanged.

Left: Shermans of A Squadron of the 44th Royal Tanks parked on the promenade at Catania. Within the 44th, A Squadron tank names all began with 'Ra'; those of B Squadron with 'Re'; of C Squadron with 'Ro'; and RHQ with 'Ru'. (IWM) *Above:* Piazza Mancini Battaglia is an unobtrusive market place along the coastal road leading north out of Catania.

A shell-damaged building on one corner of cathedral square gave AFPU photographer Sergeant Silverside a perfect background for a series of staged action pictures for which he asked some men of the 7th Royal Marines to perform as extras. *Above left:* **'A British patrol moves stealthily forward in search of lurking enemy troops' read the official caption of this one. (IWM)** *Below:* **'A close search was undertaken for enemy troops in hiding' became the caption of the next. (IWM)** *Top right:* **Looking into Via Etnea from cathedral square today. The statue on the cathedral's balustrade has had its head restored to it.**

The same Royal Marines now obligingly come charging out of the side street *back* towards Piazza Duomo. (IWM) Originally assigned as No. 31 'Beach Brick' battalion, the 7th Royal Marines had seen heavy fighting west of Sferro between July 19-23.



Left and below: **During their retreat from the Etna Line, the Germans blew up numerous bridges to slow down the Allied advance. On August 13, on the north coast road, US 3rd Division came up against a spectacular obstacle in its drive on Messina. At Cape Calavà, where the highway first swings through a short tunnel, then for a distance clings high against a rocky cliff, the Germans had blown out a whole section of the road bed. Here, foot soldiers of the 30th Infantry cautiously move across the man-made landslide. (US Army)**

THE AXIS EVACUATION

On August 8, Kesselring, on his own initiative and without waiting for approval from Hitler and OKW, ordered Hube to begin the evacuation of German forces in Sicily.

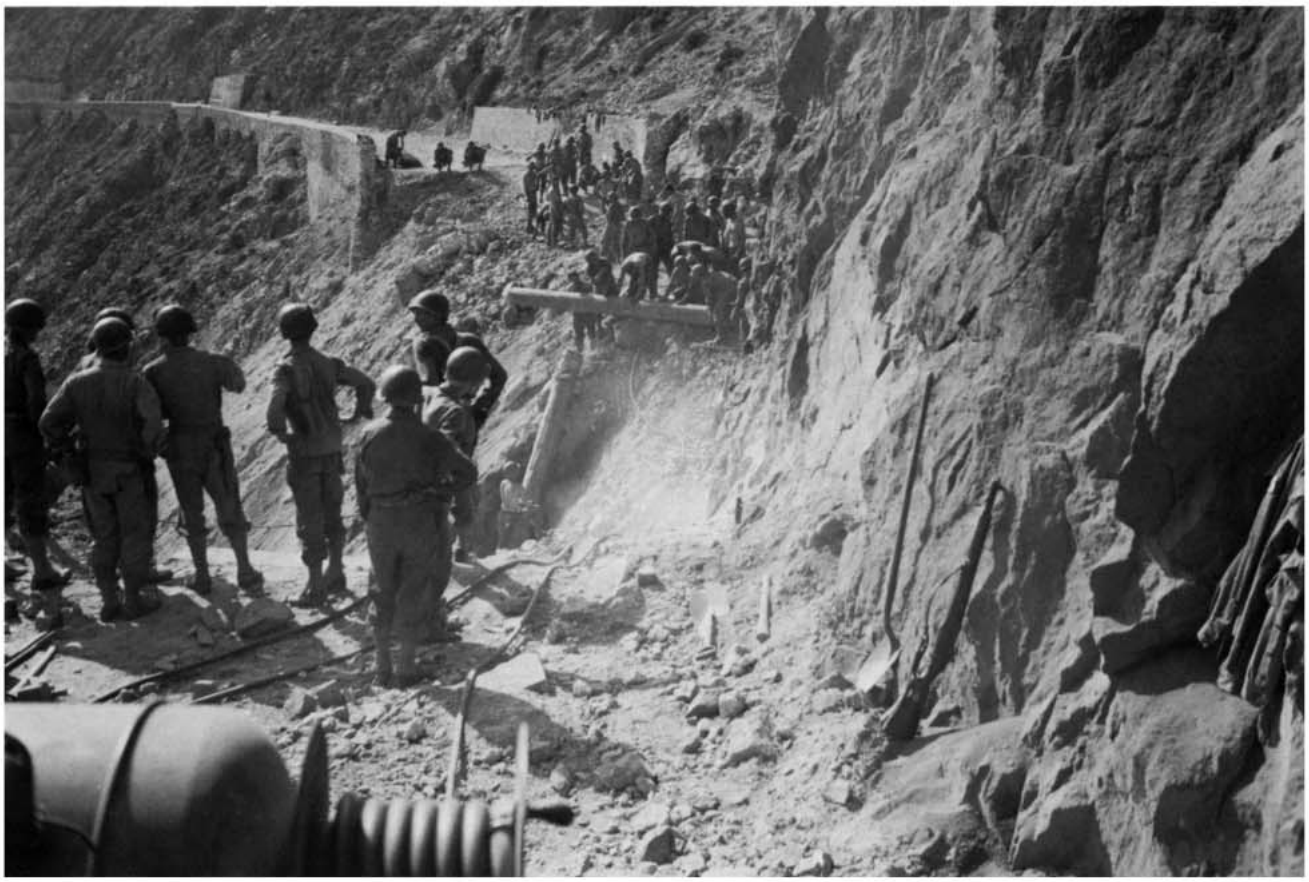
The operation had been thoroughly planned and prepared. An able and resourceful army officer, Oberst Ernst-Günther Baade, had been appointed 'Commandant Messina Strait', charged with protecting both sides of the narrow water passage against air and sea attacks. Baade had amassed some 500 guns of all calibres, including four batteries of 280mm coastal guns, two of 170mm guns and some 150 German 88mm and Italian 90mm dual-purpose guns.

A naval officer, Fregattenkapitän Baron Gustav von Liebenstein had been appointed 'Seetransportführer' (Sea Transport Leader), responsible for organising the crossings. Von Liebenstein did not rely on the normal Italian ferry services. Instead, he assembled his own fleet of seven Marine-Fährprähme (80-ton ramped barges, each capable of carrying three tanks or five trucks), 10 L-Boote (engineer pontoon 'landing boats' that could take two trucks), 11 'Siebel'-ferries (10-ton double-ended motor rafts built to carry ten trucks, 60 tons of supplies or 250 troops) and 76 small motor-boats. He also organised six new ferry routes with twelve different landing points on each side of the Strait. On August 1, Von Liebenstein started preliminary evacuations.

Hube's plan of the evacuation proper (code-named 'Lehrgang Ia') designated five lines of resistance converging on Messina, each to be held for one day. On each night, some 8,000–10,000 men would be released from the three divisions to make their way to the boats. The 15. Panzergrenadier-Division would go first, to be followed by the Hermann Göring and finally 29. Panzergrenadier-Division. When Kesselring's order came, Hube established August 10 as 'X-Tag' — the first day of the phased retirement — and the night of August 11 as the first of five nights for ferrying troops across the Strait. The crossings began as scheduled. At first, the ferries only operated after dark. On August 13, after Von Liebenstein had found that night operations were not only difficult and less efficient, but — contrary to expectations — also more hampered by enemy air attacks than daytime operations, he ordered the ferrying continued throughout daylight hours. The evacuation was successful beyond all German forecasts. Indeed, by holding one of his phase lines longer than planned, Hube gained an extra night and day for the crossings.

Even the Allied official historians agree that the Allies should never have allowed the enemy to escape in this way. Perhaps the greatest blunder of all was that the Allied service chiefs completely failed to co-ordinate air and naval efforts to prevent the enemy evacuation. The Navy, fearing another Dardanelles, refused to commit any large warships in the Strait area until the air forces had knocked out the enemy coastal guns. During the whole period, the Navy did not risk to send anything stronger into the Strait than light coastal patrols and then only at night.

The air forces did make an effort, but — as most historians agree — it started too late, was not strong enough, directed against the wrong targets and with the wrong type of planes.



The division's 10th Engineer Battalion moved up at once to restore the highway for vehicular traffic. After 18 hours of non-stop work they had completed a wooden structure, a 'bridge in the sky', that could take jeeps. Six hours later, after a bit of shoring here and there, heavier vehicles were able to cross. *Above:* The construction site on the morning of August 14, after 16 hours of work. The far side of the 150-foot crater has been blasted out and leveled off. The heavy uprights that are to support the bridge timbers across the remaining hole are being brought into place. For most of the job, because of the narrowness of the site, there was only room for one engineer platoon to work at a time. (US Army) *Below left:* The first jeep to cross was that of the division commander, Major General Lucian Truscott. Ernie Pyle, who was present and had watched the bridge being built, wrote: 'In that first jeep were General Truscott and his driver, facing a 200-foot tumble into the sea if the bridge gave way. The engineers had insisted that they send a test jeep across first. But when he saw it was ready, the general just got in and went. It wasn't done dramatically but it was a dramatic thing. It showed that the Old Man had complete faith in his engineers.' (US Army) *Above and below:* Time marches on — Cape Calavà today.

From July 29 to August 17, medium bombers, fighter-bombers and fighters flew 2,514 sorties against enemy shipping and enemy embarkation facilities in the Strait. They were up against what was probably the heaviest and most concentrated flak of the entire war. Some 31 aircraft were lost (still, an overall loss rate of only 1.23%). Nevertheless, despite round the clock air raids, the evacuation proceeded as scheduled. Thanks to Baade's massed guns, bombing was inaccurate and caused little damage to embarkation points. German losses were exceedingly low: in all, only 15 vessels were sunk or destroyed, another five damaged. Only one German was actually killed by the Allied air attacks. The Italians lost one ship and had no casualties at all.

Although the Allies knew since early August, from Ultra decrypts and other intelligence, that an evacuation was forthcoming, and acquired ample evidence when it had started, it was not until late on August 13 that all tactical air missions were directed against the Strait. Again, they attacked enemy shipping, jetties, beaches and access roads, but hardly any of the flak and coastal guns.

The Allies did not make full use of their strategic bomber capabilities either. There were 869 heavy bombers available and these high-flying craft could operate out of reach of most of the enemy flak. Yet American B-17s were asked to fly only three small daylight missions (142 sorties) against Messina and these all took place between August 5 and 8 — before the evacuation really got under way.

On August 13, US 9th Division, pushing east along Route 120 towards Messina, captured the town of Randazzo, on the northern base of Mt Etna, thereby squeezing out British 30 Corps which was struggling up round the western side of the volcano. That afternoon, General-Major Vivian Evelegh, GOC of 78th Division, met Colonel A. 'Paddy' Flint, commander of the 9th Division's 39th Infantry, outside Randazzo. *Above right:* **Evelegh (centre), members of his staff, a British cine-cameraman and American correspondents await the arrival of Flint's jeep convoy. Photo by Sergeant Dawson. (IWM)** *Right:* **The junction of Route 120 and 284 (on the left), just west of Randazzo, as it is today. Dawson took his picture from a higher standpoint, probably the roof of a vehicle.**

After the fall of Catania, 13 Corps continued to the north on the narrow front between Mt Etna and the sea. The advance across this most densely-populated part of Sicily, was slow and costly. Valverde, only six miles further on, was reached on August 8.

Left: **Troops of the 1st London Irish Rifles (50th Division) move through the town, being watched by a curious population. Photo by Sergeant Bowman. (IWM)** *Right:* **Valverde on a late afternoon in May 1992.**

Above: **That same August 8, 50th Division passed through Aci San Antonio where, later in the day, Sergeant Gladstone pictured a battery of the 124th Field Regiment, RA moving up. (IWM)** *Below:* **A palm tree has sprung up on Piazza Raimondo Cantarella.**

THE FALL OF MESSINA

On the north coast road, US 3rd Division had relieved the exhausted 45th Division on August 1 and advanced to the next German river/ridge line. Called the San Fratello position, it was so formidable that 29. Panzergrenadier-Division easily repelled one 3rd Division attack after another. Even naval gun-fire and the use of smoke could not dislodge them.

Finally, on August 6, Bradley and Truscott decided to launch an amphibious 'end run' to get in behind the enemy position. This first leap-frog operation, on the night of August 7-8, was a mixed success. Using Navy LSTs based in Palermo, Truscott mounted the reinforced 2nd Battalion of his 30th Infantry — Task Force Bernard — which landed virtually unopposed at San Agata, in the rear of the San Fratello line. Helped by this, the 3rd Division main force, after a fierce fight, broke through the line and soon after relieved the task force. However, just prior to the landing, Fries' 29. Panzergrenadier-Division had started a withdrawal and the bulk thus got away just in time.

The second amphibious operation took place three nights later and 25 miles further east and was forced upon Bradley and Truscott by Patton, who was growing ever more impatient to reach Messina. Fries had established still another defence line, along the Zappula River in the Cape Orlando peninsula, and Patton wanted another landing by Task Force Bernard at Brolo, ten miles behind enemy lines. Lieutenant-Colonel L. A. Bernard's small force did land unopposed, but was detected as it made its way to Mt Cipolla overlooking Brolo and heavily counter-attacked. When 3rd Division's main force finally relieved their comrades on the 12th, Bernard had lost 177 men and the enemy had, again, escaped.

Further inland, US 9th Division (Major General M. S. Eddy) had meanwhile relieved 1st Division. For the first time operating as a whole, the 9th pushed forward along Route 120 and took Cesaro on the 8th but the next town, Randazzo, a road centre vital to the German retreat, was strongly defended. Although battered to ruins by Allied bombers, it held out for four days and 9th Division only entered it on August 13.

After the fall of Adrano, Eighth Army's 30 Corps had pressed northwards west of Mt Etna. Between the trackless slopes of the volcano and the deep gorge of the upper Simeto, there was only room for one division, the 78th. Bronte fell on August 8, but thereafter the British met strong German resistance, so that they did not take Maletta, only four miles farther north, until the 12th. Next day, they reached Route 120 and assisted US 9th Division in the capture of Randazzo.

The Germans had established a new blocking position at Acireale, ten miles north of Catania, and 50th Division needed two days to clear it. *Left:* In the maze of streets that is the city centre, Sergeant Travis pictured a Bren gun team of the 9th Durhams waiting for enemy movement. (IWM) During his tour of Sicily, whenever Karel asked locals to help in locating a picture, this usually resulted in voluble discussions erupting, the photo being handed from person to person, but no answer. However, when he showed this one to a man in Acireale, a city of 50,000, the man took one glance at it, then quietly pointed the way to a small street off Piazzo San Sebastiano. *Right:* Karel's scepticism proved unfounded. The Italian had it absolutely correct.

This picture by Sergeant Mott was much easier, because the church in the background is Acireale's cathedral. (IWM)

Today, the Via degli Studi has been renamed Vico (alley) degli Studi and tourists crowd on the cathedral square.

Left: The 5th Division, withdrawn on August 7 to refit for the planned invasion of the Italian mainland, was brought into the line again two days later, on the left of 50th Division, to speed up 13 Corps' push to Messina. Here the 2nd Cameronians pass through Fleri, on the eastern slopes of Mt Etna. (IWM) *Above:* When first found in 1986, the buildings on either corner of the side street were still standing. Since then, both have been pulled down, leaving a far less interesting comparison.

East of Mt Etna, progress was equally slow, for, in the narrow coastal strip, the Hermann Göring engineers had blocked the roads with craters, mines, blown bridges and every other conceivable obstacle. It took 50th Division a week to advance 16 miles from Catania to Riposto, which they entered on August 11. On their left, advancing across the slopes of Etna was 5th Division. Montgomery, deciding that a two-division attack through the narrow defile might speed up the advance, had recommitted the 5th on August 9. On the 12th, it was relieved by 51st Division which had been transferred from 30 Corps.

By August 14, the Hermann Göring had broken contact and the rate of pursuit was now governed only by the speed with which the engineers could re-open the blocked routes. On the 15th, 50th Division reached the famous seaside resort of Taormina and 51st and 78th Divisions completed the circuit of Mt Etna and joined forces near Linguaglossa.

That same day, Montgomery decided also to carry out an amphibious 'end-run'. Early on the 16th, 'Currie Force' (No. 2 Commando with some tanks of 4th Armoured Brigade — in all some 400 men) landed 16 miles up the coast near Scaletta. The enemy had however already withdrawn past that point and a German rearguard precluded a push to Messina.

Meanwhile, on the north coast, US 3rd Division had quickened the tempo of pursuit. By August 15, contact with the enemy had virtually ceased. A plan for an airborne drop at Barcellona to cut off the retreating Germans was cancelled when ground troops got there first but, on Patton's insistence, a third amphibious operation went ahead. On August 16, the 45th Division's 157th Regimental Combat Team landed near Bivio Salica, east of Cape Milazzo. However, by the time it reached shore, 3rd Division had, again, advanced beyond the landing site and friendly troops greeted the first wave on the beach.

Early on August 17, 3rd Division pushed into Messina, followed at 10 a.m. by a proud General Patton. Shortly after, a commando patrol from Currie Force entered the city from the south.

The Allies found Messina empty of German troops. Shortly before, General Hube had crossed the Strait with his last rearguards. The Germans had completed their evacuation to the end. What was originally expected to end in disaster, had turned into a stunning success.

Between August 1 and 17, the Germans evacuated a total of 39,951 troops (including 14,772 wounded), 9,789 vehicles, 51 tanks, 163 guns, 16,791 tons of equipment and 1,874 of fuel and ammunition.

During that time, the Italians, using three steamers, one train ferry, and ten motor-rafts, also withdrew an estimated 59,000 troops, 227 vehicles, 41 guns and 12 mules.

After 38 days of continued fighting, the Sicilian campaign was over.

Top: **The great prize: Messina. Late on August 6, 3rd Division won the race to Messina for Patton when a platoon of the 7th Infantry pushed into the city. Next morning, the division entered Messina in strength, followed at 10 a.m. by Patton who had come to formally accept its surrender. (IWM)** *Above:* **It being the largest town in Sicily and with no other information to go on than 'Messina', Karel spent hours touring the port city, before he found where this picture had been taken. It was on the old Palermo road coming down from the mountains overlooking the Strait.**

In Sicily today, there is very little to remind a visitor of the war. Except for the ubiquitous Italian bunkers, some of which are constructed at very commanding sites, and bits of Allied steel airstrip matting used by farmers as fence material, the only wartime relics to be found are two memorials left behind by Allied units: the 51st Highland Division memorial at Sferro and the parapet plaques at 'No. 3 Commando Bridge' near Lentini.

Sicily itself, however, remains to be seen largely as it was 49 years ago. Except for the Gela beaches, which have been completely spoilt and obliterated by a giant oil refinery complex, all the invasion beaches look very much like how the assault troops saw them. The wheels of time turn very slowly on the island. As the comparisons show, most towns and villages have changed very little since 1943. Also, some of the many mountain towns which figure so prominently in the campaign — Troina and Centuripe, to name only two — are truly ideal stands for battlefield tours: their lofty positions offer the visitor some very spectacular sights and a marvellous view of the whole countryside enabling one to clearly see the tactical importance of towns, ridges, rivers and plains.

Over 4,500 German dead from the Sicilian campaign lie at Motta San Anastasia outside Catania *(below left)*. **At the nearby Commonwealth cemetery lie 2,142 British dead, with a further 1,063 Commonwealth graves at Syracuse. All 490 Canadian casualties are interred at Agira** *(below right)*. **American dead were either repatriated or transferred to mainland Italy.**

NIGHT OF THE GRAND COUNCIL – THE FALL OF MUSSOLINI

By Jeff Vincent

Benito Mussolini thrust Italy into the Second World War on June 10, 1940. His intention was to share in the plunder of a virtually prostrate France and to defeat Britain in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Three years and one month later, on July 10, 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily, and nine days on, bombed Rome for the first time. Both events came hard on the heels of a long list of Italian military disasters and severely shook the nation's remaining confidence in its leader who, up to then, had remained in complete charge of events.

Mussolini had always maintained an uneasy relationship with his Gerarchi (senior officials of the Fascist Party). On the one hand he surrounded himself with sycophants of limited intelligence such as Achille Starace who was responsible, as party secretary in the 'thirties, for most of the choreography of fascism and for spreading the myth of an infallible Duce. The more intelligent and capable Gerarchi such as Dino Grandi (former Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the Court of St James) and Giuseppe Bottai (the one true intellectual of the fascist movement) had become increasingly critical of the management of the war effort and secretly of Mussolini himself.

Consequent upon the scarcity of good advice and the constant adulation, the Duce not surprisingly had become detached from reality and by the end of June 1943 had appeared increasingly hesitant and withdrawn, a shadow of his former self. This apparent loss of concentration had coincided with a recurrence of the dictator's stomach troubles from which he had suffered on and off since before the First World War. To treat the pain of what was thought to be a duodenal ulcer, Mussolini followed a very strict diet of milk and butter derivatives and had given up tobacco and alcohol. His home life was also not as good as the regime propaganda portrayed it.

By 1943, Benito Mussolini had been in office for 20 years during which period he had transformed Italy in an attempt to recreate the power and the glory of the old Roman empire. However, military reverses and the waning of his political influence had caused the Italian people to become disillusioned and his own Fascist cronies to become dissatisfied with his leadership. *Top:* **Pre-war adulation outside the Palazzo Venezia — his administrative headquarters in the centre of Rome. (RIOD)** *Left:* **The famous balcony led directly from his palatial office on the second floor.** *Right:* **Today the building is a national museum although the Duce's office is not open to the public.**

The Mussolini family residence was the Villa Torlonia, situated in a park along Via Nomentana in Rome's north-eastern suburbs. *Above left:* **Pictured in 1935 with sons Vittorio (right) and Bruno. Bruno was killed on a test flight in 1941. (RIOD)**

The Mussolinis had lived in Rome in a huge and monumental villa belonging to Prince Torlonia, scion of one of the main Roman aristocratic families, since the late 1920s. Villa Torlonia, for which the Duce paid a peppercorn rent, was set in a huge park which he used for his daily horse rides. Mussolini and his wife Rachele lived in two separate suites on the first floor of the house and the rest of his family — his son Vittorio and his family, and the widow of his other son Bruno (killed in a plane crash in August 1941) with her daughter Marina — lived in the many smaller buildings scattered around the park. In July 1943, his other son, Romano, and daughter, Anna Maria, although usually resident at Villa Torlonia, were on holiday on the beach at Riccione in Mussolini's native Romagna.

The only member of his immediate family who did not live close by was Edda, Mussolini's fiery eldest daughter who was married to Count Galeazzo Ciano and who lived in a penthouse in the up-market Roman quarter of Parioli. Ciano had been Italy's Foreign Minister until February 1943, but by July was a mere Ambassador to the Holy See. Edda and Galeazzo had been married on April 24, 1940, in the church of Santo Stefano near Villa Torlonia, followed by a sumptuous reception in the villa park.

Villa Torlonia today belongs to the Rome Council. Parts of the structure are dangerous and, after an accident in 1989 when a child was killed by falling masonry, the building was closed off with a seven-foot fence.

On April 24, 1930, Mussolini's daughter, Edda, married Count Galeazzo Ciano. This is the wedding group on the steps of the villa. From left: Mussolini (in morning dress), his wife Rachele, Bruno, the groom's father, Count Costanzo Ciano of Cortellazzo, the bride (giving the Roman salute) and groom, Countess Carolina Ciano, and Vittorio Mussolini. (Mondadori)

Mussolini's mistress, Clara Petacci, had her own quarters in the Palazzo Venezia which she entered by this side door *(left)* **in the Via degli Astalli. Her apartment** *(right)* **is open to the public although no reference is made to its former use.**

The Duce's mistress, Clara Petacci, spent most of her day in an apartment at the back of Palazzo Venezia (Mussolini's administrative headquarters in the heart of the eternal city), which had been converted especially for her use, making herself look beautiful for her 'Ben' as she called the Duce. She entered the Palace via a back entrance every day at around midday. Clara, although an affectionate companion, was a source of stress for the Duce as she represented the power base for the clan which had formed around her family and which wielded a great deal of influence in the affairs of the state. This was especially so with her doctor brother Marcello who sold his influence to the highest bidder.

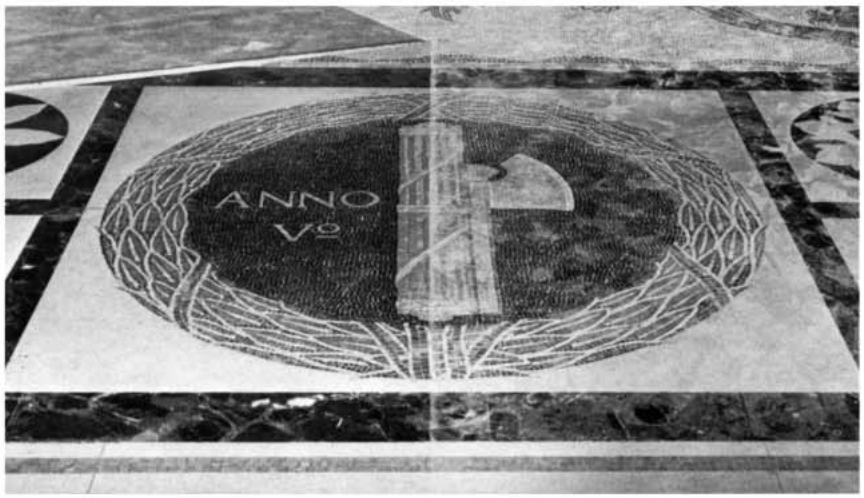
On July 14, Mussolini received a delegation of Gerarchi in his large study at Palazzo Venezia. It comprised officials who had been ordered by the Duce through Carlo Scorza, the secretary of the Fascist Party, to speak out in favour of the war at a variety of meetings throughout the country. Many of them, like Tullio Cianetti, the Minister for the Corporations (the guilds upon which the fascist state was supposedly based), found it difficult to obey the order, given that when Mussolini made the decision to enter the war he never bothered to consult them. Most sources are in agreement in saying that at this meeting a request was first put forward to the Duce for the summoning of the Gran Consiglio del Fascismo (Grand Council of Fascism). This was an advisory body of the regime last assembled in December 1939 made up of 28 of the most senior Gerarchi and chaired by the Duce himself. Its function had always been a minor one, and had been a way to get the party to rubber-stamp Mussolini's decisions. A further peculiarity of the Gran Consiglio was that it started work at 5 p.m. Since the proceedings consisted of interminable monologues by Mussolini or the party secretary (who always sat to the right of the Duce's raised dais) the proceedings always ended late at night.

Mussolini listened to the complaints and ended the meeting with a vague promise to summon the Gran Consiglio as by law only he had the power to do so. However, nothing happened. The following day at Palazzo Venezia, the Duce chaired a meeting which was to be his last military conference as head of the Italian government. Present were General Vittorio Ambrosio (Chief of the Italian General Staff, i.e. of all three Services) and Feldmarschall Albert Kesselring, German C-in-C in Italy. Although the Allies were fast advancing into the heart of Sicily, Mussolini appeared strangely detached, only mildly insisting that more German divisions cross the Messina Strait to shore up the disintegrating Italian Army. Although earlier on he had correctly recognised that using the still powerful Italian fleet was the key to weakening the Allies, Mussolini appears not to have had any intention of ordering it to sea.

On July 19, Mussolini met Hitler at Feltre (on the Austrian-Italian border) for an important meeting to discuss strategy. Although urged by General Ambrosio and by Giuseppe Bastianini, Under-Secretary to the Foreign Ministry, to try and decouple Italy from Germany, Mussolini made no effort to warn the Führer that Italy was in no state to continue the fight, confining himself to listening to one of Hitler's long monologues. His passive attitude at this meeting was a major trigger for the events which followed. The Duce's timidity in facing up to Hitler was soon common knowledge among the Gerarchi, and caused consternation among them because the Feltre meeting had been seen by the more sensible members as possibly the last chance to save Italy and the regime.

The Gerarchi's agitation and alarm, however, continued to grow with the worsening strategic situation. A consensus for either 'embalming' Mussolini or replacing him came out in the open amongst them during this period, although many were still under

Clara's room lay on the same floor as Mussolini's office *(above)*, **separated by several adjoining chambers. The office was and is known as the Sala del Mappamondo (Hall of the Globe). Here the Duce welcomes a delegation from Croatia. (RIOD)**



The Fascist 'fasces' symbol still remains to be seen in the mosaic floor which also gives the date when it was laid: the fifth year of the Fascist state, i.e. 1927.

Unlike Hitler's Chancellery in Berlin which was looted and then totally destroyed, Mussolini's office *(above left)*, **has survived virtually intact** *(below)*. **(RIOD) We had heard that essential items of Mussolini's office furniture are still kept by the museum, among them his table lamp. However, it was only when we confronted the museum staff with the picture at the top of this page that it was discovered that for all these years they had been cherishing — and restoring — the wrong one! The real thing was found, dust-covered and forgotten, in the museum cellars** *(above right)*.

the spell of the dictator. Then, on the 20th and quite unexpectedly, Mussolini agreed to summon the Council to meet at 5 p.m. on Saturday, July 24.

In the days preceding the meeting, three different alignments within the Fascist Party emerged. The first, championed by Roberto Farinacci, one of the most violent of the Gerarchi, was to seek a closer collaboration with the Germans, which would mean letting them take over the running of the Italian war effort. The second, proposed by party secretary Carlo Scorza, was to seek a rallying of the party. The third, initially championed by Dino Grandi, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Giuseppe Bottai, Minister for Education, and Luigi Federzoni, President of the Italian Academy, was to implore King Vittorio Emanuele III to take over the command of the armed forces from Mussolini to whom it had been delegated at the beginning of the war. The common ground between these three approaches was that there would be a change of rôle for the Duce. All three were formally submitted as motions to be discussed at the meeting.

Mussolini was made aware of the contents of all three motions and appears to have been in no doubt as to what was in store for him if the Grandi motion was accepted, his wife and mistress having both warned him of impending danger.

On the afternoon of the 24th, the mood of most of those involved was maudlin, only Bottai and Grandi, and perhaps Ciano, appearing to have fully understood what was at stake.

Left: **Mussolini's huge desk is said to be the one now used as a reading table in the museum library.** *Right:* **His personal Olivetti typewriter was regularly used until recently by Dottoressa Maria Barberini of the museum staff.**

The conference chamber, which was the scene of the decisive meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on Saturday, July 24, 1943, is located beyond the connecting anteroom from Mussolini's study (out of picture to the right). No photo appears to exist of that fateful meeting, the one above being taken on April 13, 1939. (Mondadori)

THE NIGHT OF THE GRAND COUNCIL

That afternoon, as the Gerarchi arrived one by one in the courtyard of Palazzo Venezia, they were met by an ominously heavily-armed company of blackshirts. Grandi, for one, had the feeling of having walked into a trap.

At 5.15 p.m., Mussolini, in the uniform of Consul General of the Militia, followed by Scorza, entered the steaming council chamber from his study, known as the 'Hall of the Globe', and opened the meeting with a 45-minute speech on the military situation. In particular he accused his troops and generals of cowardice. This brought Marshal Emilio De Bono to his feet to defend the Army and express his contempt for the Germans who according to him (and to most of the Gerarchi present) were the real traitors as they had not consulted their allies before invading Poland.

De Bono was interrupted angrily by Roberto Farinacci, champion of the Axis, who discussed the content of his pro-German motion and smeared the realistic attitude of Chief-of-Staff General Vittorio Ambrosio as defeatism. De Bono, Federzoni, Bottai and Cesare Maria De Vecchi (Governor of the Italian Aegean Colonies) all then spoke against Farinacci.

Around 7 p.m., after the discussions had been under way for almost two hours, Grandi rose for the first time and explained the substance of his motion (the 'Ordine del Giorno Grandi' or Order of the Day — *see inset*), asking for support and reminding the Duce and Scorza that they both had seen the motion 48 hours previously. Gaetano Polverelli, Minister for Popular Culture, Carlo Alberto Biggini, Minister of Education, and Farinacci then stood to oppose the motion while Federzoni, Alfredo De Marsico, Justice Minister, Alberto De Stefani of the Italian Academy, Bottai, Annio Bignardi (President of the Italian Farmers Confederation), and Ciano all expressed their support for Grandi.

At 11.30 p.m., after a menacing speech by the hard-line General Italo Galbiati, Chief-of-Staff to the Militia, Grandi won a 20-minute break from the Duce. During the interval, although fearing imminent arrest, Grandi and his comrades managed to secure 20 signatures for the motion (one man, Count Giacomo Suardo, President of the Senate, later abstained). After the meeting reassembled, the discussion raged on until 3 a.m. when the voting on the Grandi motion began. Unbelievably, Scorza had withdrawn his motion and Farinacci's gained only one vote — that of its author.

Grandi's motion was accepted and the meeting broke up at 3.30 a.m. when the Duce informed the Gerarchi that he would go to Villa Savoia (the royal residence) to brief the King the next day.

The Grand Council of Fascism assembled in this hour of supreme trial turns its thoughts firstly to the heroic combatants of all arms who side by side with the proud Sicilian people in whom rests the highest faith of the Italian people renew the noble traditions of strenuous valour and of indomitable spirit of sacrifice of our glorious armed forces. Having examined the national and international situation and the political and military conduct of the war:

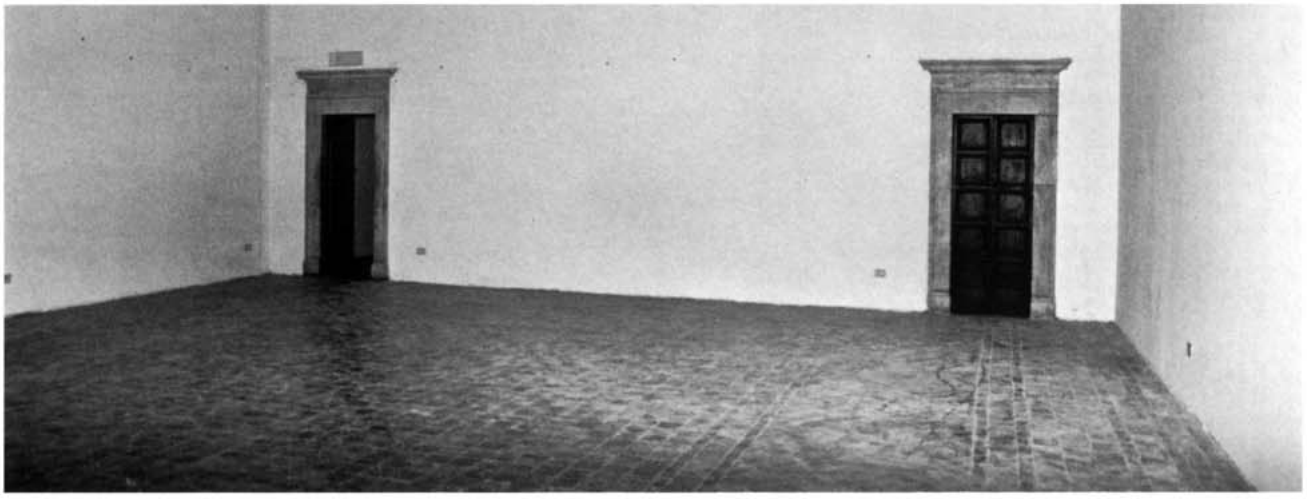
proclaims the sacred duty of all Italians to defend at all costs the unity, independence and freedom of the fatherland, the fruits of the sacrifice and of the efforts of our four generations from the Risorgimento to our days, and the life and future of the Italian people;

affirms the need for the moral and physical union of all Italians in this grave and decisive hour for the destiny of the Nation;

declares that to this aim it is necessary to reactivate all functions of the state, giving the Crown, the Grand Council, the Government, Parliament and the Corporations the duties and responsibilities laid down by our statutory and constitutional laws;

invites the Government to ask His Majesty the King, to whom the heart of the whole nation turns with faith and trust, to take over for the honour and safety of the fatherland with the effective command of the land, sea and air armed forces as per article 5 of the statute of the Kingdom, that supreme initiative of decision which our institutions grant Him and which have always been in all our national history the glorious legacy of our August Dynasty of Savoia.

There followed the nineteen signatures of its supporters.



Whitewashed and stripped of all its decoration, the former council chamber is also not open to the public.

ENTER THE KING

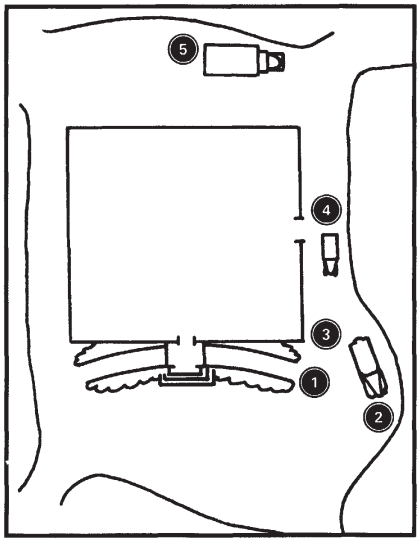
Italy's diminutive King had been in contact with Grandi since 1940, and the Gerarca had expressed all his doubts and misgivings to his sovereign. The King had always told his retinue that in order to get rid of the Duce he needed a vote against Mussolini by one of the regime's own internal organs such as the Grand Council. This was a somewhat unlikely event in a dictatorship and one which only took place after thousands of Italian lives had been lost. These scruples were euphemistically termed 'constitutional' by the King's advisers. At their last meeting on June 4, Victor Emmanuel had told Grandi he would act when the time was ripe. Grandi kept him informed of his plans through Minister D'Acquarone but despaired of the King's apparent inertia. He felt, probably rightly, that the King's scruples should long ago have been overcome by events.

After the Council had broken up, Grandi had briefed D'Acquarone on the outcome and he in turn informed the King who, with uncharacteristic decision, set about preparing a trap for the Duce.

After a brief sleep, Mussolini had spent July 25 at his desk and had been informed by Scorza that Cianetti had withdrawn his signature and support for the Grandi motion. The Duce had tried frantically to shore up his position by trying to demonstrate that the vote was meaningless, as, according to him, the Gran Consiglio was only a consultative body and, under Italy's pre-fascist constitution, the King could disregard the outcome of the previous night's proceedings.

At five o'clock that afternoon the Duce was driven with his secretary, Nicolo De Cesare, to meet the King, fully confident that Victor Emmanuel would confirm him as head of government. This misjudgment was to cost him and his family dear. During the meeting, which lasted half an hour, the King listened to Mussolini without comment before forcing him to resign as head of the government. As the Duce and De Cesare walked down the steps of Villa Savoia's front entrance, they were greeted by Lieutenant-Colonel Frignani, Chief Constable Morazzini, Captains Vigneri and Aversa, three policemen armed with sub-machine guns, three senior NCOs and 50 men of the Carabinieri, a somewhat large body of people to simply arrest one man. When the officers informed Mussolini that he was under arrest, he meekly allowed them to put him in a waiting ambulance which drove to the Podgora Carabinieri Barracks. There he was to remain until transferred to the island of Ponza and then Maddalena (off the northern Sardinian coast) and eventually to the Gran Sasso.

At 10.45 p.m. that night, the Italians were informed in a broadcast that Mussolini had been arrested, and that the King had appointed a new Prime Minister, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who had now formed the first non-fascist government since 1922. No member from any of Mussolini's Cabinets had been included. Grandi recalls walking exhaustedly in the centre of Rome as the news broke and witnessing scenes of delirious joy as the populace thought that this meant the end of the war. Few had read Badoglio's first communiqué which contained the famous phrase . . . 'the war goes on' (as allies of Germany).



The following day Mussolini drove to the Royal residence for an audience with King Victor Emmanuel III. The Villa Savoia lay some four kilometers north of the Palazzo Venezia in a secluded park on the Via Salaria. In the hours since the meeting, and after long qualms, the King had decided to appoint Marshal Pietro Badoglio as the new head of government and had agreed to have Mussolini arrested. A Carabinieri colonel with 50 men had already arrived and taken up position when the Duce drove up shortly after 5 p.m. The King listened to Mussolini's version of what had happened the evening before. Totally disagreeing with Mussolini belittling the vote of no confidence against him, the King curtly cut him short, calling for the Duce's immediate resignation. Silenced by the unexpected forcefulness of his monarch, Mussolini meekly accepted the inevitable. *Left:* **As the Duce descended the steps of the villa with his secretary, Nicolo De Cesare (1), he saw that his car had been moved (2). He was met by Captain Vigneri and four other Carabinieri officers (3) who escorted him to an ambulance which had been parked at the side of the building (4). The other Carabinieri were drawn up to its rear (5). Without protest, Mussolini climbed aboard and the doors were slammed shut.** *Right:* **Today, the Villa Savoia houses the Egyptian Embassy.**

AFTERMATH

Italy continued the war against the Allies until the armistice was signed at Cassibile on September 3. News of the armistice was broadcast five days later whereupon the Germans invaded the peninsula. Overnight the former ally turned into an occupation force. The King and his entourage, with Badoglio and his government, fled overland to Pescara and then by sea to Bari, leaving behind an army without orders or leadership. It was soon disarmed by the Germans and part of it was interned in Germany.

Now only a shadow of his former self, Mussolini was freed from Gran Sasso by German commandos *(see After the Battle No. 22)* on September 12. He joined Hitler in Germany and then proclaimed a fascist republic in those parts of Italy not yet under Allied control. As Badoglio's government also assembled armed forces equipped by the Allies, and the partisans started a guerrilla campaign in the German rear areas, by the end of 1943 Italy slid into a civil war that was to leave a long-lasting impression on its people and politics.

Mussolini was freed by Otto Skorzeny in September *(see After the Battle No. 22)* and reinstated by the Germans in northern Italy, the southern part of the country being under increasing threat from the Allies who had just landed at Salerno. The Castelvecchio *(above)* in Verona was the venue for the Duce's retribution against 'the traitors of the 25th of July'. *Below left:* The trial began on Saturday, January 8, 1944, in the Sala Boggian. *Below right:* Bombed at the end of the year by the Allies, it was restored in 1947-48, the castle now being used as a museum. (Mondadori)

THE FATE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE GRAND COUNCIL OF FASCISM

Mussolini and his German masters pursued a vendetta against the nineteen 'traitors of the 25th of July'. Grandi, the number one target of the Germans, following a tip-off, flew with his family from Guidonia near Rome on August 19 to Seville and then on to Madrid and Lisbon. Federzoni escaped likewise. Both emigrated to South America and in the 1960s returned to Italy. Federzoni died in 1967 while Grandi survived, blind and infirm, until 1988, having embarked on a second career as a successful businessman.

Ciano made the mistake of asking the Germans for protection. He was flown with his family to Germany but was eventually brought back to the territory of Mussolini's fascist Republic of Salo in northern Italy and imprisoned in Verona. He was tried and shot on January 11, 1944, with four of the other 'traitors': Pareschi, De Bono, Gottardi and Marinelli. His wife, Edda, tried in vain to save him by arranging to swap his life for his famous diaries which contained embarrassing details of the Italo-German alliance.

At the Verona trial, Tullio Cianetti was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment (his life was only spared because of his timely withdrawal of support to the Grandi motion). Freed by the Allies in 1945, he emigrated to Mozambique where he ran an import-export business until his death in 1976.

Roberto Farinacci fled to the German Embassy on the evening of July 26. During the next 20 months of Mussolini's puppet republic, he was one of the most vociferous Gerarchi demanding the lives of the conspirators. (He had conveniently forgotten that he too had wanted Mussolini replaced!) He was captured by partisans and shot at Vimercate outside Milan on April 28, 1945.

The vendetta, although perhaps understandable from Hitler's point of view, is far less so from the Duce's. He and his party secretary, Scorza, had both known the contents of Grandi's motion. They could hardly not have understood its implications. Others, like General Galbiati, had clearly done so. If Mussolini did not like its content, or was sure that a coup was in the making (as he later claimed), he could have had all the nineteen arrested at any time during the meeting or

Of the nineteen men who had put their names to the vote of no confidence, many had gone into hiding or escaped from Italy so that only six could be brought to trial. From L-R: Marshal De Bono (with his hands over his eyes), Luciano Gottardi, Count Ciano, Carlo Pareschi, Giovanni Marinelli and Tullio Cianetti. (Mondadori)

When the verdicts were delivered all were sentenced to death, save Cianetti who was given 30 years' imprisonment. The executions were carried out at Fort Procolo — a shooting range not far from the castle. Its present day name is the Poligono di Ponte Catena. The five were tied to chairs with their backs to the firing squad. A request by Ciano to face about was denied although at the instant of firing he turned and fell wounded. (Mondadori)

afterwards. The Verona executions were nothing less than useless killings perpetrated by men who themselves had only fifteen months to live.

Some have tried to explain Mussolini's behaviour by his illness (and contemporary pictures show him thin and haggard). The nature of his stomach ailments remains a mystery as two post-mortem examinations of his body in April–May 1945 showed no macroscopic or microscopic pathology in his gastro-intestinal tract. Historians have wondered whether these ailments were psychosomatic in origin.

Other historians have argued that perhaps Mussolini's intention had been to arrest the conspirators after his interview with the King, thereby showing Hitler his complete command of the situation. If this was indeed so, Grandi spotted the final irony of history. The Gran Consiglio had originally been created as an instrument of the dictatorship to destroy what was left of the power of the King and of the pre-fascist democratic constitution. It ended its life relinquishing its powers to that same monarchy and asking the King to reactivate the constitution. On the other hand, Mussolini had tried in extremis to exploit the monarch's constitutional scruples, by using the principles of the old constitution to get the King to confirm him as dictator of Italy. Whoever captured the King won the match.

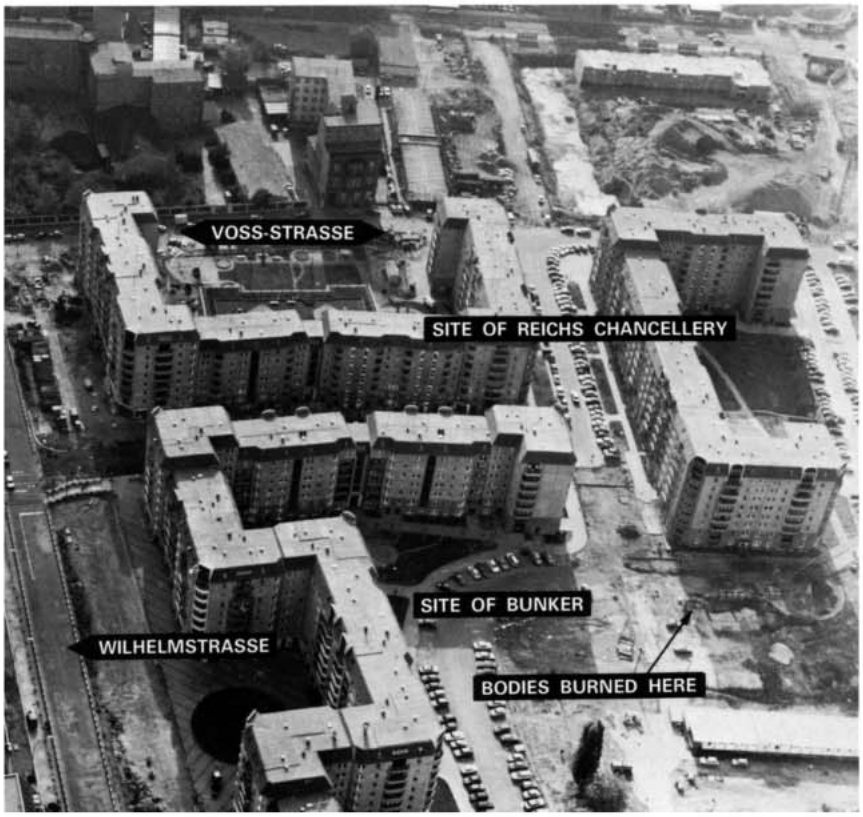
After the administration of the coup de grâce, Don Giuseppe Chiot administers extreme unction to the fallen count. (Mondadori)

Recapping on the story so far, on May 1, 1945 the Red Army captured the 'Imperial Chancellery' *(left)*—Hitler's administrative headquarters in the heart of Berlin. However, there was no trace of the German leader or his immediate entourage so the special section of SMERSH (the Soviet military counter-intelligence organisation) detailed to gather evidence on their whereabouts swung into action. On May 5, severely burned human remains were uncovered in the garden of the Chancellery a few yards from the Führerbunker, close to the spot where the bodies of Hitler and his wife were said to have been set alight *(right)*.

THE DEATH OF HITLER . . . THE STORY CONTINUES

In issue No. 61 published in August 1988 covering the Reichs Chancellery and Führerbunker in Berlin, Andrew Mollo described the last days in the bunker using all the available sources. Little were we to know that within a matter of months, the communist world would collapse across Europe opening up many sealed doors, particularly in the Soviet Union.

It was the Soviets who had discovered the charred bodies of Hitler, his newly-betrothed wife, Eva, and those of Joseph Goebbels, his wife and children, in the grounds of the Chancellery at the beginning of May 1945. While the Western allies were forced to kick their heels for some two months west of the Elbe, waiting to take their rightful place in the occupation of Berlin, the Russians were having a field day with the capital all to themselves. In June, the Soviets admitted that several bodies had been found, one of which might be Hitler's but they could not confirm that the German leader was dead. By the time British and American forces entered the city on July 4, the trail had gone cold and visitors to the Chancellery were merely shown a builder's trench in the garden where the bodies were supposed to have been burned.



The Chancellery was razed after the war and the Führerbunker partially demolished and buried in 1988. This picture (taken specially for *Berlin Then and Now*) shows the site in 1991. In July 1992, the Berlin archaeologist, Dr Alfred Kernd'l, secured the preservation of the bunker remains and other underground cellars.

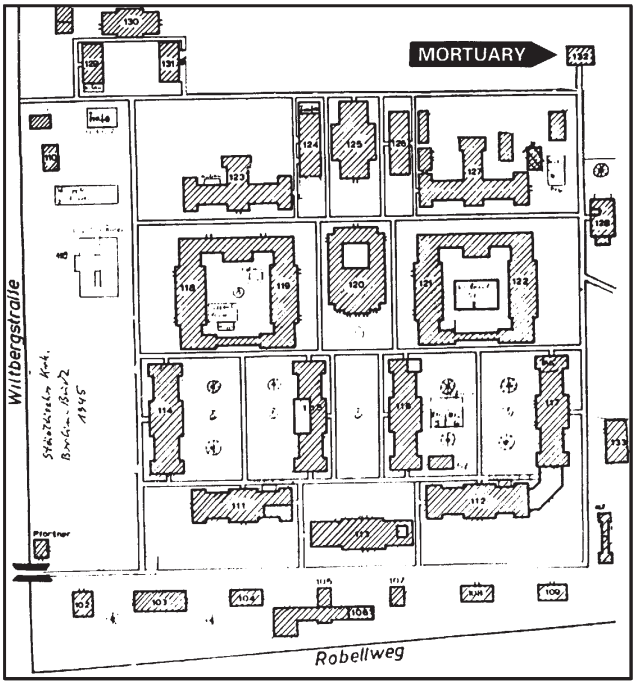
Bodies recovered from the area were taken to Plötzensee prison where the SMERSH unit was stationed. Various Germans who had been captured, including Vizeadmiral Hans-Erich Voss (Dönitz's liaison officer) were brought in to identify the corpses *(left)*, this particularly gruesome specimen *(right)* being recognisable, even in death, as that of Dr Goebbels.

With the lack of any positive evidence as to whether Hitler was dead or if, as had been rumoured, he had escaped from Berlin, the fate of the German leader had to be resolved, and a team of British investigators was chosen, led by a counter-espionage officer from MI5, Brigadier Dick White. Field-Marshal Montgomery wrote to his opposite number, Marshal Zhukov, with whom he had an accord, asking the Russian commander to give White his full cooperation.

When Brigadier White arrived in Berlin he was shown a set of teeth which the Soviets claimed as Hitler's but one vital clue which the Russians had missed was the diary found stuffed down the side of a chair in the bunker *(see issue 62)* although the man who had compiled it, Hitler's valet, Heinz Linge, was not produced from Soviet captivity for interview.

The investigation, code-named Operation 'Nursery', formed a conclusion as to the sequence of events in April 1945 which has stood the test of time and one of the people in White's team, Major Hugh Trevor-Roper, seconded from the Radio Security Service branch of MI5, and a qualified historian of Christ Church, Oxford, wrote up the findings for public consumption published in 1947 under the title *The Last Days of Hitler*.

Six of the bodies, which had been found in the bunker, were easily identifiable as being those of the Goebbels' children who had been poisoned while they slept. A seventh unburned body was that of General Hans Krebs. The charred corpses of Goebbels and his wife were also not in dispute but the identity of the severely burned remains could not be readily established. All were taken to this hospital on Wiltbergstrasse in the northern suburb of Buch where the Third Shock Army had set up its field hospital.



The Soviets had established Surgical Field Hospital No. 496 in what is now the Klinikum Berlin-Buch but, because of the prohibition against photographing official buildings during the communist era, we did not venture to Buch in 1988 when preparing issue 61. In 1945 many of the outbuildings were occupied by Berliners who had lost their homes in the bombing, one of the strangest coincidences being that the family of Walter Wagner, the man who had officiated at Hitler's last-minute marriage ceremony in the bunker, were then living in Building 103! This is the mortuary located in Building 132 at the rear of the hospital complex photographed in 1990.

However, as early as September 1945, the Russians were accusing the British of harbouring Hitler in their zone of occupation but twenty years were to pass before they released their own version of the hunt for the German leader. In 1965, the Soviet press agency, Novosti, released a report by a Lieutenant-Colonel Ivan Klimenko who, as head of the Counter Intelligence Section (SMERSH) of the 79th Rifle Corps, was detailed to carry out the search for Hitler, or his body, in 1945. His story was backed up in part by a novel, *Spring in Uniform* written by his interpreter, Lieutenant Elana Rzhevskaya. Then, in 1968, a fuller account including autopsy details, was released by the Soviets in a roundabout way through the publication of a book by Lev Bezymenski's titled *The Death of Adolf Hitler*.

Back in 1988, we had wanted to follow the trail from the Führerbunker on to the hospital in the East Berlin suburb of Buch where the autopsies had been carried out (which were illustrated in the Bezymenski book). However, as recounted in issue 72 (published in May 1991 after the East German regime had fallen), photography at the bunker had been carried out by Tom Posch under considerable difficulty, and in the face of an outright ban by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Tom strongly advised us not to take the risk of visiting the hospital as photography of such buildings was strictly verboten. The following year, of course, everything changed and we soon took the opportunity to seek out the mortuary situated at the rear of the hospital complex on Wiltbergstrasse near the S-Bahn station.

Klimenko's SMERSH unit had taken over Plötzensee prison (later in the British Sector of West Berlin) where film was taken of the bodies after removal from the Chancellery. However, although the rear part of the prison containing the execution chamber has since been opened to the public, we were denied access to the courtyard within the prison proper to take comparison pictures.

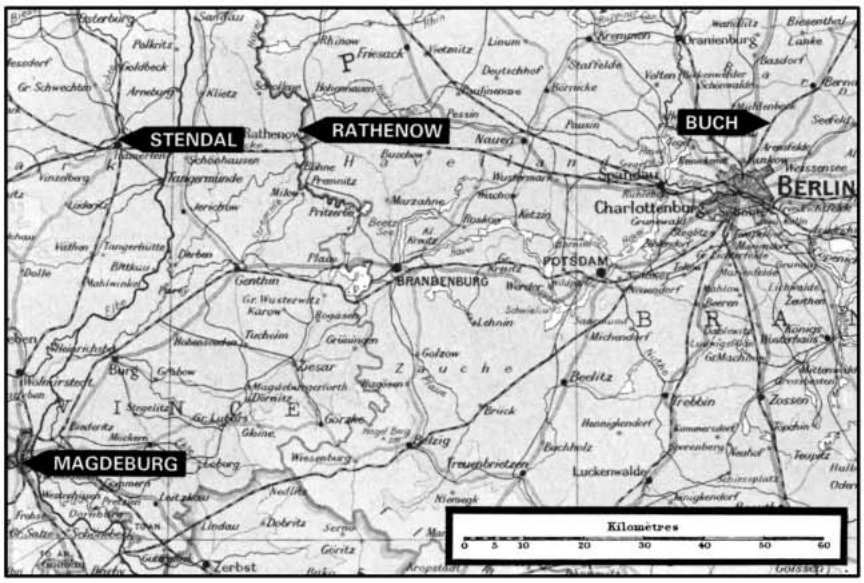
SMERSH (an Anglicised derivative of 'Smert Shpionam' meaning 'Death to Spies'), was the body within the Soviet intelligence system responsible for security in the Soviet armed forces. Disbanded after the war, most of its personnel were absorbed by the NKVD until this became the KGB (the Peoples' Commissariat for Internal Affairs) in 1954. Being the unit responsible for the search for Hitler in 1945, it was a good guess that SMERSH had also been responsible for the disposal of the remains, a fact confirmed by Captain Fjedor Vassilki.

Harry Mengershausen, a member of the Reichs-Sicherheits-Dienst, had been an eyewitness to the burying of the bodies in the Chancellery garden and he languished in Russian imprisonment until 1955. On his release, he admitted that it was he who had actually dug Hitler's first grave a few feet from the cremation trench. He also said he had been taken by the Russians to a forest outside Berlin to identify the bodies. He thought the location of this wood was some 40 kilometres north of the city at Finow; in fact it is now believed that it was 100 kilometres west of Berlin between Rathenow and Stendal in the province of Sachsen-Anhalt. This would seem to have been around September time when Stalin was having doubts as to whether Hitler really was dead. He therefore ordered a second autopsy to be held and the results to be brought by courier to Moscow. Satisfied that the corpses had been properly identified, Stalin could not risk the bodies being discovered or, even worse, being stolen and used for propaganda against him. Ever since, there has been speculation that Stalin then ordered the remains to be brought to Moscow and that it was there in the Soviet capital that they were finally destroyed.

The autopsies were performed by a team of pathologists from the Red Army on May 7-9 although no details were released by the Russians until the surprise publication of translations of their reports through Lev Bezymenski in 1968. Nevertheless, the final disposition of the remains was never disclosed.

When Karel Margry, our recently-appointed ETO Editor, together with Jan Heitmann, visited the mortuary, Dr Manfred Jauert, who now works there, showed them round and confirmed that the building was indeed the correct one. However, he said that the fact that it had been used for the Hitler autopsies was something that could never be openly discussed during the existence of the German Democratic Republic.

As far as the West was concerned, Hitler was officially pronounced dead on October 26, 1956. Here a court official, Josef Müller, posts the formal death certificate on the notice board of the Berchtesgadener Amtsgericht.



In 1968 Lev Bezymenski wrote that 'it was resolved [in 1945] not to publish the results of the forensic-medical report but to "hold it in reserve" in case someone might try to slip into the rôle of "the Führer saved by a miracle". Secondly it was resolved to continue the investigations in order to exclude any possibility of error or deliberate deception.' Recent revelations by former members of the SMERSH unit involved in disposing of the remains indicate that the bodies were first buried in the hospital grounds. However, when the unit was posted to Stendal, the bodies were dug up and taken to the new SMERSH headquarters where a second autopsy was performed on Stalin's orders. The remains were then buried in a forest not far away near Rathenow. *Right:* **The most significant Russian grave at Stendal today is that of the first Russian commandant of the town, Lieutenant-Colonel Alekperov Kasimovitsch, who lost his life in December 1945.**

With the demise of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of the KGB, it was inevitable that further information would become available from the new Commonwealth of Independent States concerning the ultimate disposal of the corpses. Following the August 1991 coup, archives which were formerly closed to Western journalists and historians suddenly became accessible, and television producers, in particular, from several countries began scouring Russia for new material. In the Netherlands, the Foreign Media Affairs organisation decided to make a documentary on the battle of Berlin in association with Progress Video of Moscow and, having heard of our forthcoming book on the subject, they contacted us in September 1991.

The following month they interviewed a certain ex-SMERSH Lieutenant-Colonel, Ivan Blashchuk, who claimed to have been one of those responsible for guarding the corpses of the Nazi hierarchy at Plötzensee prison and later at Buch. Blashchuk claimed that the bodies had first been buried in the hospital grounds but when the graves showed signs of being disturbed — rumours were rife about buried Nazi treasure — the bodies were disinterred and reburied in a forest grave near Rathenow, not far from Stendal to where the SMERSH unit had been transferred.

Blashchuk then claimed that the bodies had been dug up a third time when the unit moved 30 miles to the south to the city of Magdeburg. SMERSH had requisitioned a whole section of Westendstrasse in the Sudenburg district of the city, and he said that the bodies had been buried within the security of the SMERSH compound. He claimed that he knew the location of Hitler's grave and that as far as he was aware, the remains were still there.

When the section was transferred to Magdeburg, it was stated that the bodies were moved a third time to new graves, this time within the security of the SMERSH compound. This was centered on Westendstrasse in the Sudenburg area of the city, seen in this picture under the cameras of No. 542 Squadron, RAF, in April 1945.

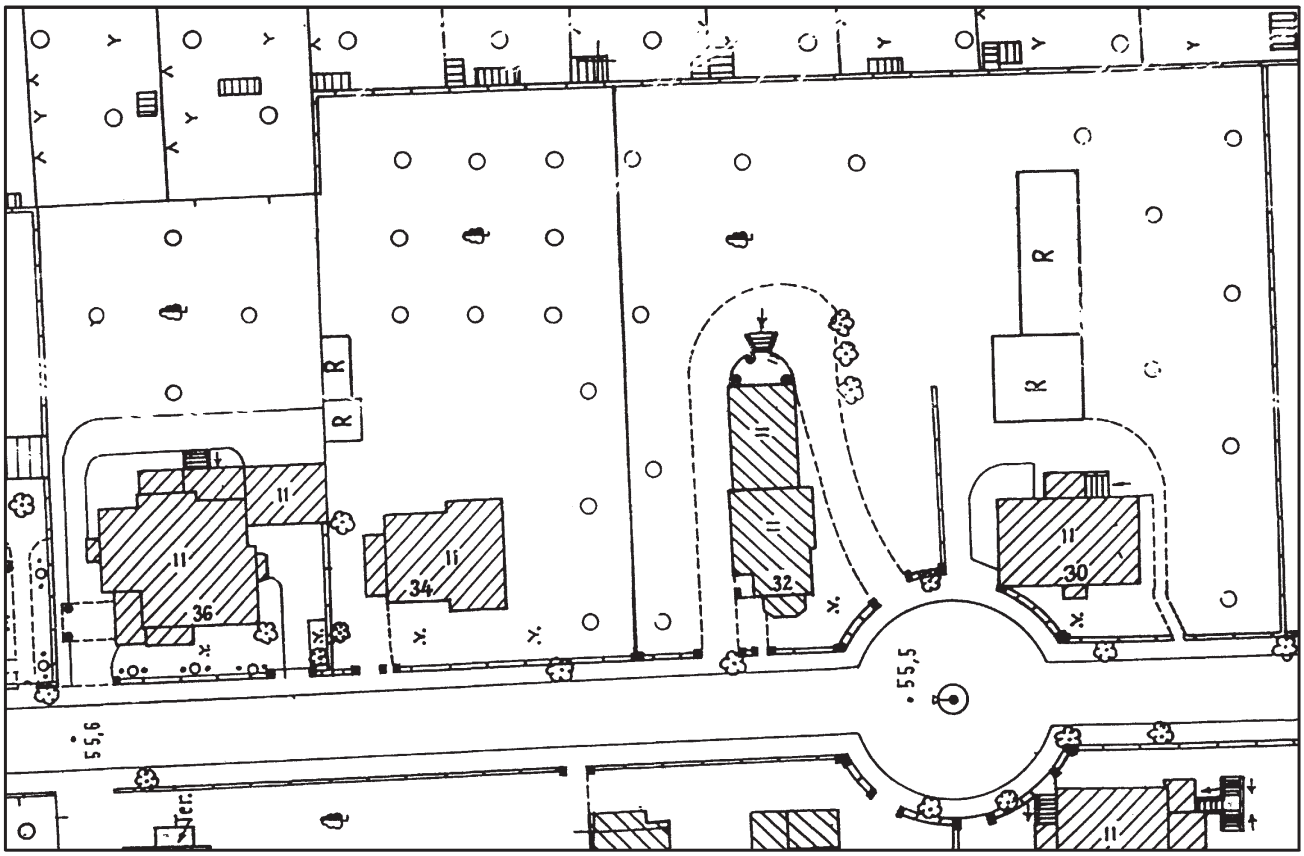
Left: **SMERSH officers in Westendstrasse in 1945: (left), Captain Ivan Tereshchenko. (Sunday Express)** *Right:* **Although the Germans are fond of changing the names of their roads, it is significant that Westendstrasse is the only street in the Sudenburg area to be altered by the GDR: to Klausenerstrasse. The Soviet military still occupied several of the run-down villas bordering the tree-lined street as late as May 1991. This view is taken looking east across the roundabout.**

Blashchuk gave the Dutch TV company the name of a second officer who also lived in Moscow although he had not seen him since he had left Germany in 1951. Ex-Captain Ivan Tereshchenko was also interviewed and he stated that he had been chief of the SMERSH secretariat in Magdeburg and had been given custody of documents confirming the burial and reburial of the remains of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun. Tereshchenko recalled that one document listed the officers present at the final burial in the inspection pit of the SMERSH garage located at No. 32 Westendstrasse under the instructions of Colonel Gorbushin, the deputy chief of SMERSH in the Third Shock Army.

A third ex-SMERSH officer, Major Vasily Orlovsky, was interviewed at his home in Vinnitsa in the Ukraine and he claimed to have witnessed the burial of Goebbels and his family, together with General Hans Krebs whose body had also been found in the Führerbunker, in the back garden of No. 36 Westendstrasse, also within the compound.

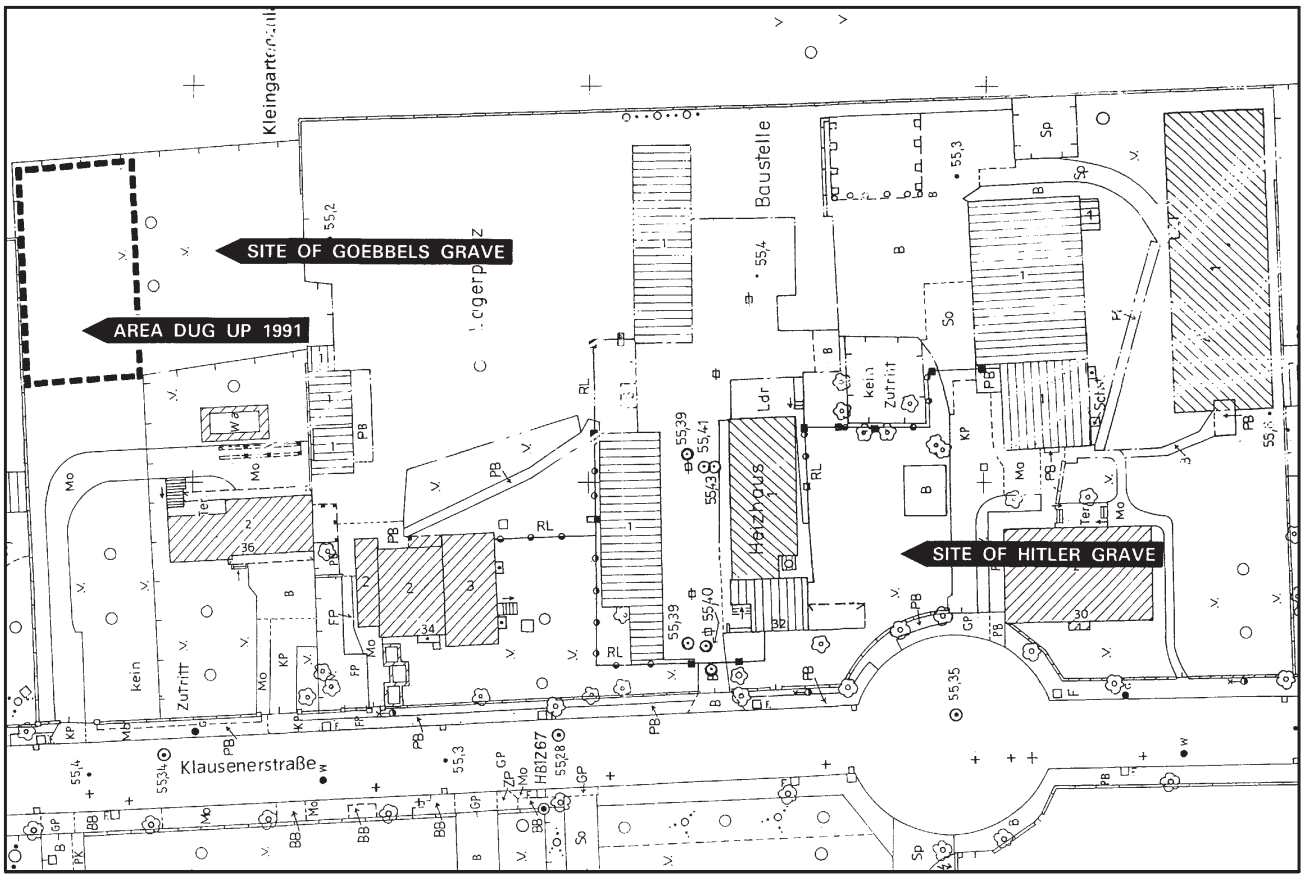
With such a revealing story on their hands, the FMA company decided to make the burials the subject of a separate documentary and, at the same time, capitalise on their discovery by selling the rights to the highest bidder. In the end, it was the British *Express* newspaper group which bought the story but not before several German newspapers got wind of the affair. Representatives of one journal arrived in Magdeburg one weekend in October and promptly began digging up the back garden of one of the houses in

The locations which concern us most all lie on the eastern side of the street although several of the original houses occupied by SMERSH have been demolished or rebuilt. *Above left:* **Of No. 36, only the rear servants' quarters survive.** *Above right:* **No. 34 is more or less the same.** *Below left:* **No. 32 has since been rebuilt but No. 30** *(below right)* **remains almost unchanged.**



Klausenerstrasse (as Westendstrasse is now called) while the occupier was away. The only trouble was that it was the wrong garden and the owner was not a little annoyed to find holes all over the place. It was only under pressure of disclosure that the paper finally recompensed the irate householder.

These two plans give a good idea of how this part of the SMERSH compound has altered just in the last few years. *Above:* **The situation in February 1979 and** *below* **the identical area ten years later. We have annotated the two areas pointed out by Captain Tereshchenko and Lieutenant-Colonel Ivan Blashchuk when they were taken back to Magdeburg by the Dutch Foreign Media Affairs organisation in November 1991. Also shown is the area dug up by an unnamed German newspaper. Compare with the aerial photograph of the compound in 1945 on page 49.**



Although there was little in the street that was familiar to the Russians, the roundabout which they both remembered was an ideal feature for them to orient themselves. Once he had got his bearings, Tereshchenko was able to point out where the large garage had stood beside No. 32. It could accommodate at least five cars and was equipped with an inspection pit to facilitate servicing. It was in this pit, claimed Tereshchenko, that Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun had been buried.

We were naturally interested in the story from the beginning but were precluded from publishing anything until the *Express* went public and so the May 1992 edition of *After the Battle* came and went. The story was due to be released in the *Sunday Express* on July 5 to launch the paper's change in size from a broadsheet to a tabloid. However, as the weeks went by, it seemed inevitable that someone, somewhere, would pre-empt the scheduled publication date which was also supposed to coincide with the broadcast of the film documentary. In the end it was Henk Langerak, writing in the Dutch paper *Algemeen Dagblad* on Wednesday, July 1, who first revealed the existence of the graves at Magdeburg and the involvement of Foreign Media Affairs and the *Daily Express*.

Salt was rubbed in the wound the following day when the *Daily Mail*, arch-rival of the *Express*, published a 'spoiler' article titled 'Hitler hoax industry cranks up again', claiming that the story had been purchased by an 'unsuspecting newspaper editor' for a reputed £100,000.

Although the *Express* tried to fob us off on Friday (July 3), saying that they were still checking the accuracy of the FMA claims, behind the scenes they were worried that the *Daily Mail* was about to steal their thunder. That evening, under the supervision of Barrie Penrose and Alfred Lee of the *Express* and Klaas-Jan Hindriks for FMA, both sites were excavated using a Zeppelin digger in the presence of a Polish archaeologist, Eugen Tomczak.

On July 5, the new tabloid *Sunday Express* included a four-page exposé under the headline 'How the Russians Disposed of Hitler' with a follow-up in Monday's *Daily Express* entitled: 'Battle to Pinpoint Secret Hitler Grave'. The *Express* reported that bones which 'may turn out to be parts of a human skeleton' had been discovered, and had been handed over to a local pathologist, Dr Werner Kühne, (a recently-retired Director of Pathology at the city Academy of Medicine), for examination.

Karel Margry was quickly on the scene to check on developments. Having already photographed the reputed locations of the graves *(see back cover)*, he now found instead large areas of disturbed earth with evidence of a mechanical digger having been used. Local residents knew little about what had taken place as the digging had begun late on Friday evening and continued on Saturday morning. Karel soon established that the few bone fragments that had been unearthed had been judged by Dr Kühne 'more likely to be from an animal than from a human being', and that they had already been disposed of in a dustbin on Sunday.

So far, there had been little reaction from the German government, the Interior Ministry being quoted as trying to distance itself from the affair which could obviously turn out to be a political bombshell. A spokesman had absolutely no comment to make on the claims which could establish Klausenerstrasse as a new Nazi shrine.

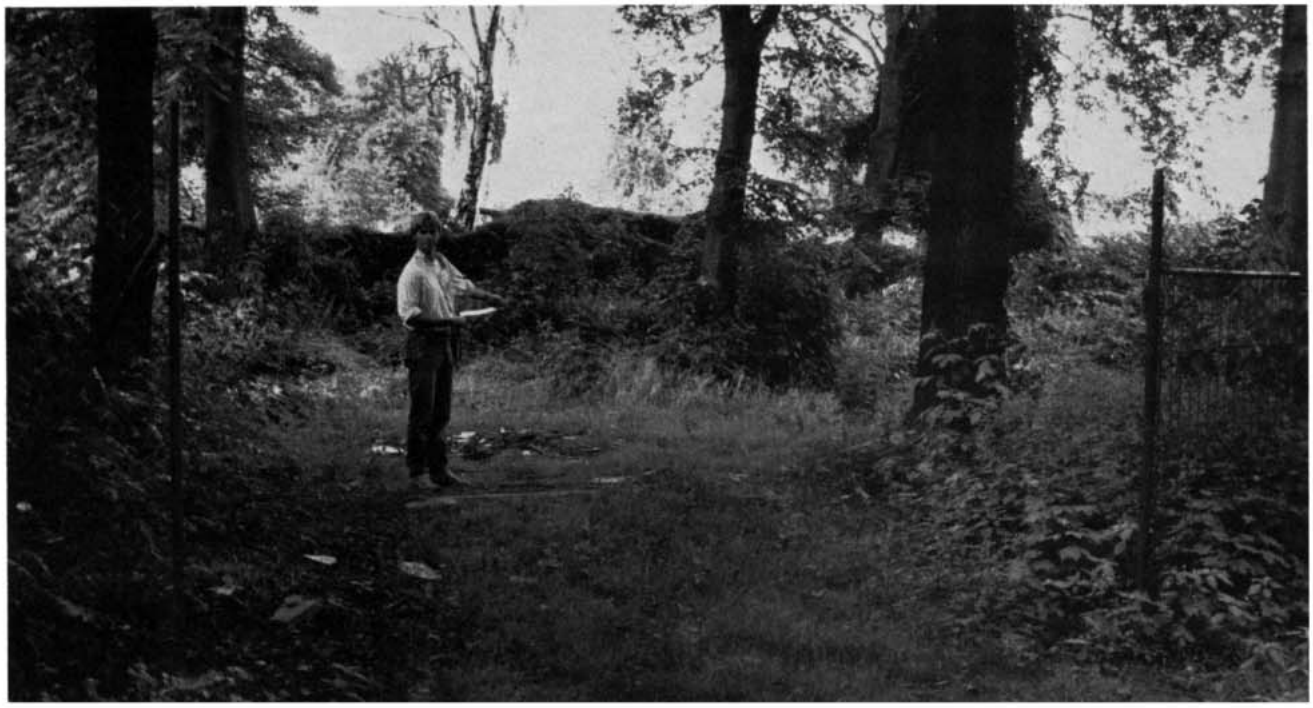
The events had already been reported in the local newspaper, the *Magdeburger Volksstimme*, on Friday (before the digging took place) but none of the main German papers took the story up. Representatives from three German newspapers had appeared on the scene but they only seemed aware of the Goebbels grave in the back garden of No. 36.

Tuesday's *Daily Express* (July 7) gave the impression in its half-page follow on that digging was still taking place but in fact the site had already been levelled on Sunday. The paper admitted to us that the whole exercise was merely something that they could exploit in the bitter circulation war being fought by Britain's newspaper industry.

That Sunday, the Hitler bones story had clashed with a front page leader in *The Sunday Times* about the missing pages of the Goebbels diaries, which they said had been found in a Moscow archive by David Irving and were to be serialised beginning the following weekend. Once again the *Daily Mail* stepped in with a huge spoiler in their edition of Friday, July 10. The paper had discovered that the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich already had a complete copy of Goebbels diaries which they had obtained from Russia two months before Irving alerted the *Sunday Times* to their existence. Publishing four pages of extracts under the banner headline 'Lost Secrets of the Nazis' the *Daily Mail* claimed a 'world exclusive' two days before the planned release by *The Sunday Times*!

On Wednesday evening, July 8, the Dutch national TV station, TROS, broadcast a ten-minute trailer for the FMA documentary which they announced would be shown in two parts beginning with the first instalment on the following Wednesday. An admission was made that perhaps the rushed digging operation had not been carried out on the correct spot as the location pointed out by the SMERSH witnesses could well have been a few metres adrift. It was stated that it was now believed that Hitler's remains lay beneath the 18-cm-thick concrete slab which once formed part of the garage floor and that the Goebbels' grave was situated beneath a garden shed between numbers 36 and 38.

These two pictures were taken before and after the digging operation carried out on July 3-4, 1992 by the *Express* and Foreign Media Affairs. Although journalists from at least three other papers were on the scene during Friday (July 3), they had all left by the time digging commenced at 5.00 p.m. The local newspaper did not bother to post a man in Klausenerstrasse to keep watch as they had already rejected the story in that morning's paper as just another Hitler hoax.



However, the Russians' recollection of the second grave, that of the Goebbels' family, was less positive. Blashchuk related how, in the spring of 1946, he was walking along the street with a colleague who told him that from his window he had seen the burial of the bodies in wooden crates in the garden of No. 36. Blashchuk thought that this had taken place one night in December 1945 or January 1946 but he could not be definite about the precise location. Here Karel examines the garden which was of considerable size, now having been sub-divided to create two separate plots.

The truth of the matter was somewhat different. The Soviet historian, Lev Bezymenski, had known that the bodies lay buried in ammunition boxes in Germany although he would not have dreamed of disclosing anything which might have led to the bones of Hitler being recovered by Nazi sympathisers. When he published his book in 1968, Hitler's teeth, as part of the autopsy specimens, were already in Moscow, safely stored away in case it ever became necessary to refute some Western claim that Hitler was still alive.

With German unification approaching in 1990, and in the knowledge that the Magdeburg graves would soon fall into Western hands, Bezymenski checked whether the bodies were still there but was assured that everything had been dealt with 20 years earlier. Back in 1970, most probably when the NKVD (or KGB) relinquished the compound, the remains had been dug up yet again by the Soviet Army and taken to Russia for disposal. Thus the whole FMA 'affair' had been a useless exercise based on out of date information, for what little remained of Hitler and his entourage had already been destroyed in Moscow.

The Russians had spoken of the grave as being 'near to chestnut trees' but today there was only one such tree behind No. 36. Because of the hard dry soil and thick tree roots, the digging technique adopted was to use the excavator to remove bucketfuls of earth which were then sifted through with spades. The average depth uncovered was one metre but at around 60 cm some bones were found. Although the newspapermen did not believe that they had found anything significant, nevertheless it was decided to get a professional opinion. Dr Werner Kühne, a local Professor of Pathology, had already been contacted and asked if he could 'be available for consultation by someone from England' although he was not told anything about human bones or Nazi graves. The bones which had been found were delivered to him mid-morning on Saturday. Somewhat surprised, he explained that being a pathologist he was not really an expert in anatomy but his qualified opinion was that the bones were 'more likely to be from some animal than from a human being'. He advised that a second opinion should be sought from an anatomist. With the story due to go to press that night, a frantic effort was made throughout the afternoon to reach a suitable person but without success. By the time Karel had inspected the churned up garden *(above)*, and spoken with Dr Kühne on Sunday, the bones had already been thrown away, the Professor commenting that the fragments were too small to be human and appeared to have been chopped up as if from a slaughtered animal. With nothing to show for the hurried dig, the *Express* quietly let the story die during the following week and FMA were forced to modify the ending of their documentary to explain that they may not have been digging on the correct spot after all. The following week, revelations by Lev Bezymenski indicated that the whole exercise had been a complete waste of time as the remains had all been removed in 1970! It seems that before the properties had been vacated, the Soviet Army had mounted a secret operation to dig up the two graves and transport what little remained to Moscow where it could be destroyed once and for all. Fortunately by so doing, the German government was saved from an embarrassing situation as one has already seen on many occasions how difficult it is for the Germans to cope with their recent history, posing the question of how they would possibly have handled the discovery of the mortal remains of Herr Hitler?

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